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MACLEOD OF DARE.

A Novel.

VOL. I.

MACLEOD OF DARE.

MACLEOD OF DARE.

A Novel.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "MADCAP VIOLET," "A PRINCESS OF THULE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

BIBLIOTHECA
MAR 1879
BODLEIANA.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1879.

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[illegible]
[illegible] CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR,
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C.

To my good friends J. Pettie, R.A., T. Graham, G. H. Boughton, W. Q. Orchardson, R.A., Colin Hunter, J. MacWhirter, C. E. Johnson, J. A. Aitken, T. Faed, R.A., J. E. Millais, R.A., F. Powell, and P. Graham, A.R.A., I have much pleasure in dedicating this story; and that not so much in the way of any compliment to them as to record my deep sense of gratitude to them for having turned aside from more important labours to give me each a drawing in illustration of the tale. If the book were better worthy of such distinguished collaboration, I should have less scruple — but equal pride — in placing their names on this page.

LONDON, *November*, 1878.

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MACLEOD OF DARE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIX BOYS OF DARE.

THE sun had sunk behind the lonely western seas; Ulva, and Lunga, and the Dutchman's Cap had grown dark on the darkening waters; and the smooth Atlantic swell was booming along the sombre caves; but up here in Castle Dare—on the high and rocky coast of Mull—the great hall was lit with such a blaze of candles as Castle Dare had but rarely seen. And yet there were no grand festivities going forward; for there were only three people seated at one end of the long and narrow table; and the banquet that the faithful Hamish had provided for them was of the most frugal kind. At the head of the table sat an old lady, with silvery-white hair and proud

and fine features. It would have been a keen and haughty face but for the unutterable sadness of the eyes—blue-grey eyes under black eye-lashes, that must have been beautiful enough in her youth, but were now dimmed and worn, as if the weight of the world's sorrow had been too much for the proud, high spirit. On the right of Lady Macleod sat the last of her six sons, Keith by name, a tall, sparely-built, sinewy young fellow, with a sun-tanned cheek and crisp and curling hair; and with a happy and careless look in his clear eyes and about his mouth that rather blinded one to the firm lines of his face. Glad youth shone there; and the health begotten of hard exposure to wind and weather. What was life to him but a laugh, so long as there was a prow to cleave the plunging seas, and a glass to pick out the branching antlers far away amid the mists of the corrie? To please his mother, on this the last night of his being at home, he wore the kilt; and he had hung his broad blue bonnet, with its sprig of juniper—the badge of the clan—on the top of one of the many pikes and halberds that stood by the great fireplace. Oppo-

site him, on the old lady's left hand, sat his cousin, or rather half-cousin, the plain-featured but large-hearted Janet, whom the poor people about that neighbourhood regarded as being something more than any mere mortal woman. If there had been any young artist among that Celtic peasantry fired by religious enthusiasm to paint the face of a Madonna, it would have been the plain features of Janet Macleod he would have dreamed about and striven to transfer to his canvas. Her eyes were fine, it is true: they were honest and tender; they were not unlike the eyes of the grand old lady who sat at the head of the table; but, unlike hers, they were not weighted with the sorrow of years.

"It is a dark hour you have chosen to go away from your home," said the mother; and the lean hand, resting on the table before her, trembled somewhat.

"Why, mother," the young man said lightly, "you know I am to have Captain ——'s cabin as far as Greenock; and there will be plenty of time for me to put the kilt away, before I am seen by the people."

"Oh, Keith!" his cousin cried—for she was trying to be very cheerful too. "Do you say that you are ashamed of the tartan?"

"Ashamed of the tartan!" he said, with a laugh. "Is there any one who has been brought up at Dare who is likely to be ashamed of the tartan? When I am ashamed of the tartan I will put a pigeon's feather in my cap, as the new *suaicheantas* of this branch of Clann Leoid. But then, my good Janet, I would as soon think of taking my rifle and the dogs through the streets of London as of wearing the kilt in the south."

The old lady paid no heed. Her hands were now clasped before her. There was sad thinking in her eyes.

"You are the last of my six boys," said she, "and you are going away from me too."

"Now, now, mother," said he, "you must not make so much of a holiday. You would not have me always at Dare? You know that no good comes of a stay-at-home."

She knew the proverb. Her other sons had not been stay-at-homes. What had come to them?

Of Torquil, the eldest, the traveller, the dare-devil, the grave is unknown; but the story of how he met his death, in far Arizona, came years after to England, and to Castle Dare. He sold his life dearly, as became one of his race and name. When his attendants found a band of twenty Apaches riding down on them, the cowards unhitched the mules and galloped off; leaving him to confront the savages by himself. One of these, more courageous than his fellows, advanced and drew his arrow to the barb: the next second he uttered a yell, and rolled from his saddle to the ground, shot through the heart. Macleod seized this instant, when the savages were terror-stricken by the precision of the white man's weapons, to retreat a few yards and get behind a mesquit tree. Here he was pretty well sheltered from the arrows that they sent in clouds about him; while he succeeded in killing other two of his enemies who had ventured to approach. At last they rode off; and it seemed as though he would be permitted to rejoin his dastardly comrades. But the Indians had only gone to windward to set the tall grass on fire; and

presently he had to scramble, burnt and blinded, up the tree, where he was an easy mark for their arrows. Fortunately, when he fell, he was dead: this was the story told by some friendly Indians to a party of white men, and subsequently brought home to Castle Dare.

The next four of the sons of Dare were soldiers, as most of the Macleods of that family had been. And if you ask about the graves of Roderick and Ronald, what is one to say? They are known, and yet unknown. The two lads were in one of the Highland regiments that served in the Crimea. They both lie buried on the bleak plains outside Sebastopol. And if the memorial stones put up to them and their brother officers are falling into ruin and decay—if the very graves have been rifled—how is England to help that? England is the poorest country in the world. There was a talk some two or three years ago of putting up a monument on Cathcart Hill to the Englishmen who died in the Crimea; and that at least would have been some token of remembrance, even if we could not collect the scattered remains of our slain sons, as the French have done. But then

that monument would have cost 5,000*l.* How could England afford 5,000*l.*? When a big American city takes fire, or when a district in France is inundated, she can put her hand into her pocket deeply enough; but how can we expect so proud a mother to think twice about her children who perished in fighting for her? Happily, the dead are independent of forgetfulness.

Olaus the Fair-haired lies buried in a jungle on the African coast. He was only twenty-three when he was killed; but he knew he had got the Victoria Cross. As he lay dying, he asked whether the people in England would send it to his mother, showing that his last fancies were still about Castle Dare.

And Hector? As you cross the river at Sadowa, and pass through a bit of forest, some corn-fields begin to appear, and these stretch away up to the heights of Chlum. Along the ridge there, by the side of the wood, are many mounds of earth. Over the grave of Hector Macleod is no proud and pathetic inscription such as marks the last resting-place of the young lieutenant

who perished at Gravelotte—*Er ruht sanft in wiedererkämpfter Deutscher Erde;* but the young Highland officer was well-beloved by his comrades, and when the dead were being pitched into the great holes dug for them, and when rude hands were preparing the simple record, painted on a wooden cross, "*Hier liegen—tapfere Krieger,*" a separate memento was placed over the grave of Under-Lieutenant Hector Macleod of the ——th Imperial and Royal Cavalry Regiment. He was one of the two sons who had not inherited the title. Was it not a proud boast for this white-haired lady in Mull that she had been the mother of four baronets? What other mother in all the land could say as much? And yet it was that that had dimmed and saddened the beautiful eyes.

And now her youngest—her Benjamin—her best-beloved—he was going away from her too. It was not enough that the big deer-forest, the last of the possessions of the Macleods of Dare, had been kept intact for him, when the letting of it to a rich Englishman would greatly have helped the failing fortunes of the family; it was

not enough that the poor people about, knowing Lady Macleod's wishes, had no thought of keeping a salmon-spear hidden in the thatch of their cottages. Salmon and stag could no longer bind him to the place. The young blood stirred. And when he asked her what good thing came of being a stay-at-home, what could she say?

Suddenly old Hamish threw wide the oaken doors at the end of the hall; and there was a low roar like the roaring of lions. And then a young lad, with the pipes proudly perched on his shoulder, marched in with a stately step, and joyous and shrill arose the Salute. Three times he marched round the long and narrow hall, finishing behind Keith Macleod's chair. The young man turned to him.

"It was well played, Donald," said he, in the Gaelic, "and I will tell you that the Skye College in the old times never turned out a better pupil. And will you take a glass of whisky now, or a glass of claret? And it is a great pity your hair is red; or they would call you Donull Dubh, and people would say you were the born successor of the last of the MacCruimins."

At this praise—imagine telling a piper-lad that he was a fit successor of the MacCruimins, the hereditary pipers of the Macleods!—the young stripling blushed hot; but he did not forget his professional dignity for all that. And he was so proud of his good English that he replied in that tongue.

"I will take a glass of the claret wine, Sir Keith," said he.

Young Macleod took up a horn tumbler, rimmed with silver, and having the triple-towered castle of the Macleods engraved on it, and filled it with wine. He handed it to the lad.

"I drink your health, Lady Macleod," said he, when he had removed his cap, "and I drink your health, Miss Macleod; and I drink your health, Sir Keith; and I would have a lighter heart this night if I was going with you away to England."

It was a bold demand.

"I cannot take you with me, Donald; the Macleods have got out of the way of taking their piper with them now. You must stay and look after the dogs."

"But you are taking Oscar with you, Sir Keith."

"Yes, I am. I must make sure of having one friend with me in the south."

"And I think I would be better than a collie," muttered the lad to himself, as he moved off in a proud and hurt way towards the door, his cap still in his hand.

And now a great silence fell over these three; and Janet Macleod looked anxiously towards the old lady, who sat unmoved in the face of the ordeal through which she knew she must pass. It was an old custom that each night a pibroch should be played in Castle Dare in remembrance of her five slain sons; and yet on this one night her niece would fain have seen that custom abandoned. For was not the pibroch the famous and pathetic *Cumhadh na Cloinne*, the Lament for the Children, that Patrick Mòr, one of the pipers of Macleod of Skye, had composed to the memory of his seven sons, who had all died within one year? And now the doors were opened, and the piper-boy once more entered. The wild, sad wail arose;

and slow and solemn was the step with which he walked up the hall. Lady Macleod sat calm and erect, her lips proud and firm, but her lean hands were working nervously together; and at last, when the doors were closed on the slow and stately and mournful "Lament for the Children," she bent down the silvery head on those wrinkled hands, and wept aloud. Patrick Mòr's seven brave sons could have been no more to him than her six tall lads had been to her; and now the last of them was going away from her.

"Do you know," said Janet quickly, to her cousin across the table, "that it is said no piper in the west Highlands can play 'Lord Lovat's Lament' like our Donald?"

"Oh, yes, he plays it very well; and he has got a good step," Macleod said. "But you will tell him to play no more Laments to-night. Let him take to strathspeys if any of the lads come up after bringing back the boat. It will be time enough for him to make a Lament for me when I am dead. Come, mother, have you no message for Norman Ogilvie?"

The old lady had nerved herself again, though her hands were still trembling.

"I hope he will come back with you, Keith," she said.

"For the shooting? No, no, mother. He is not fit for the shooting about here: I have seen that long ago. Do you think he could lie for an hour in a wet bog? It was up at Fort William I saw him last year; and I said to him 'Do you wear gloves at Aldershot?' His hands were as white as the hands of a woman."

"It is no woman's hand you have, Keith," his cousin said; "it is a soldier's hand."

"Yes," said he, with his face flushing, "and if I had had Norman Ogilvie's chance——"

But he paused. Could he reproach this old dame, on the very night of his departure, with having disappointed all those dreams of military service and glory that are almost the natural inheritance of a Macleod of the Western Highlands? If he was a stay-at-home at least his hands were not white. And yet, when young Ogilvie and he studied under the same tutor —the poor man had to travel eighteen miles

between the two houses, many a time in hard weather—all the talk and aspirations of the boys were about a soldier's life; and Macleod could show his friend the various trophies and curiosities sent home by his elder brothers from all parts of the world. And now the lily-fingered and gentle-natured Ogilvie was at Aldershot; while he—what else was he than a mere deer-stalker and salmon-killer?

"Ogilvie has been very kind to me, mother," he said, laughing. "He has sent me a list of places in London where I am to get my clothes, and boots, and a hat; and by the time I have done that he will be up from Aldershot, and will lead me about—with a string round my neck, I suppose, lest I should bite somebody."

"You could not go better to London than in your own tartan," said the proud mother; "and it is not for an Ogilvie to say how a Macleod shall be dressed. But it is no matter. One after the other has gone; the house is left empty at last. And they all went away like you, with a laugh on their face. It was but a trip, a holiday, they said: they would soon be

back to Dare. And where are they this night?"

Old Hamish came in.

"It will be time for the boat now, Sir Keith, and the men are down at the shore."

He rose, the handsome young fellow, and took his broad blue bonnet with the badge of juniper.

"Good-bye, Cousin Janet," said he lightly. "Good-bye, mother—you are not going to send me away in this sad fashion? What am I to bring you back? A satin gown from Paris? or a young bride to cheer up the old house?"

She took no heed of the passing jest. He kissed her, and bade her good-bye once more. The clear stars were shining over Castle Dare, and over the black shadows of the mountains, and the smoothly swelling waters of the Atlantic. There was a dull booming of the waves along the rocks.

He had thrown his plaid around him, and he was wondering to himself as he descended the steep path to the shore. He could not believe that the two women were really saddened by

his going to the south for a while; he was not given to forebodings. And he had nearly reached the shore when he was overtaken by some one running with a light step behind him. He turned quickly, and found his cousin before him, a shawl thrown round her head and shoulders.

"Oh, Keith!" said she, in a bright and matter-of-fact way, "I have a message for you from myself—and I did not want auntie to hear, for she is very proud, you know, and I hope you won't be. You know we are all very poor, Keith; and yet you must not want money in London, if only for the sake of the family; and you know I have a little, Keith—and I want you to take it. You won't mind my being frank with you. I have written a letter."

She had the envelope in her hand.

"And if I would take money from any one it would be from you, Cousin Janet; but I am not so selfish as that. What would all the poor people do if I were to take your money to London and spend it?"

"I have kept a little," said she, "and it is not much that is needed. It is 2,000*l.* I would

like you to take from me, Keith; I have written a letter."

"Why, bless me, Janet, that is nearly all the money you've got!"

"I know it."

"Well, I may not be able to earn any money for myself, but at least I would not think of squandering your little fortune. No, no; but I thank you all the same, Janet; and I know that it is with a free heart that you offer it."

"But this is a favour, Keith," said she. "I do not ask you to spend the money. But you might be in trouble; and you would be too proud to ask any one—perhaps you would not even ask me; and here is a letter that you can keep till then, and if you should want the money you can open the letter, and it will tell you how to get it."

"And it is a poor forecast you are making, Cousin Janet," said he cheerfully. "I am to play the prodigal son, then? But I will take the letter. And good-bye again, Janet; and God bless you, for you are a kind-hearted woman."

She went swiftly up to Castle Dare again,

and he walked on towards the shore. By and by he reached a small stone pier that ran out among some rocks, and by the side of it lay a small sailing-launch, with four men in her, and Donald the piper-boy perched up at the bow. There was a lamp swinging at her mast, but she had no sail up, for there was scarcely any wind.

"Is it time to go out now?" said Macleod to Hamish, who stood waiting on the pier, having carried down his master's portmanteau.

"Ay, it will be time now, even if you will wait a little," said Hamish; and then the old man added, "It is a dark night, Sir Keith, for your going away from Castle Dare."

"And it will be the brighter morning when I come back," answered the young man, for he could not mistake the intention of the words.

"Yes, indeed, Sir Keith; and now you will go into the boat, and you will take care of your footing, for the night it is ferry dark, and the rocks they are always slippery whatever."

But Keith Macleod's foot was as familiar with the soft seaweed of the rocks as it was

with the hard heather of the hills; and he found no difficulty in getting into the broad-beamed boat. The men put out their oars, and pushed her off. And now, in the dark night the skirl of the pipes arose again; and it was no stately and mournful lament that young Donald played up there at the bow, as the four oars struck the sea, and sent a flash of white fire down into the deeps.

"Donald," Hamish had said to him, on the shore, "when you are going out to the steamer, it is the *79th's Farewell to Chubralter* that you will play; and you will play no other thing than that." And surely the 79th were not sorry to leave Gibraltar when their piper composed for them so glad a farewell.

At the high windows of Castle Dare the mother stood, and her niece; and as they watched the yellow lamp move slowly out from the black shore they heard this proud and joyous march that Donald was playing to herald the approach of his master. They listened to it as it grew fainter and fainter, and as the small yellow star, trembling over the

dark waters, became more and more remote. And then this other sound: this blowing of a steam-whistle, far away in the darkness?

"He will be in good time, aunt; she is a long way off yet," said Janet Macleod; but the mother did not speak.

Out there, on the dark and moving waters, the great steamer was slowing drawing near the open boat; and, as she came up, the vast hull of her, seen against the starlit sky, seemed a mountain.

"Now, Donald," Macleod called out, "you will take the dog; here is the string; and you will see he does not spring into the water."

"Yes, I will take the dog," muttered the boy, half to himself. "Oh, yes, I will take the dog; but it was better if I was going with you, Sir Keith, than any dog."

A rope was thrown out, the boat dragged up to the side of the steamer, the small gangway let down, and presently Macleod was on the deck of the large vessel. Then Oscar was hauled up too, and the rope flung loose; and the boat drifted away into the darkness. But

the last good-bye had not been said, for over the black waters came the sound of the pipes once more, the melancholy wail of the *Mackintosh's Lament.*

"Confound that obstinate brat!" Macleod said to himself. "Now he will go back to Castle Dare, and make the women miserable."

"The captain is below at his supper, Sir Keith," said the mate. "Will you go down to him?"

"Yes, I will go down to him," said he, and he made his way along the deck of the steamer.

He was arrested by the sound of some one crying, and he looked down and found a woman crouched under the bulwarks, with two small children asleep on her knee.

"My good woman, what is the matter with you?" said he.

"The night is cold," she said in the Gaelic, "and my children are cold; and it is a long way that we are going."

He answered her in her own tongue.

"You will be warmer if you go below; but here is a plaid for you anyway," and with that

he took the plaid from round his shoulders and flung it across the children, and passed on.

That was the way of the Macleods of Dare. They had a royal manner with them. Perhaps that was the reason that their revenues were now far from royal.

And meanwhile the red light still burned in the high windows of Castle Dare, and two women were there looking out on the pale stars and the dark sea beneath. They waited until they heard the plashing of oars in the small bay below, and the message was brought them that Sir Keith had got safely on board the great steamer. Then they turned away from the silent and empty night, and one of them was weeping bitterly.

"It is the last of my six sons that has gone from me," she said, coming back to the old refrain, and refusing to be comforted.

"And I have lost my brother," said Janet Macleod, in her simple way. "But he will come back to us, auntie; and then we shall have great doings at Castle Dare."

CHAPTER II.

MENTOR.

It was with a wholly indescribable surprise and delight that Macleod came upon the life and stir and gaiety of London in the sweet June time, when the parks and gardens and squares would of themselves have been a sufficient wonder to him. The change from the sombre shores of Lochs na Keal, and Tua, and Scridain to this world of sunlit foliage—the golden yellow of the laburnum, the cream-white of the chestnut, the rose-pink of the red hawthorn, and everywhere the keen translucent green of the young lime-trees—was enough to fill the heart with joy and gladness, though he had been no diligent student of landscape and colour. The few days he had to spend by himself—while getting properly dressed to satisfy the demands of his friend—passed quickly enough. He was

not at all ashamed of his country-made clothes as he watched the whirl of carriages in Piccadilly, or lounged under the elms of Hyde Park, with his beautiful silver-white and lemon-coloured collie attracting the admiration of every passer-by. Nor had he waited for the permission of Lieutenant Ogilvie to make his entrance into at least one little corner of society. He was recognised in St. James's Street one morning by a noble lady whom he had met once or twice at Inverness; and she, having stopped her carriage, was pleased to ask him to lunch with herself and her husband next day. To the great grief of Oscar, who had to be shut up by himself, Macleod went up next day to Brook Street, and there met several people whose names he knew as representatives of old Highland families, but who were very English, as it seemed to him, in their speech and ways. He was rather petted, for he was a handsome lad; and he had high spirits and a proud air. And his hostess was so kind as to mention that the Caledonian Ball was coming off on the 25th; and of course he must come, in the Highland

costume; and, as she was one of the patronesses, should she give him a voucher? Macleod answered, laughingly, that he would be glad to have it, though he did not know what it was; whereupon she was pleased to say that no wonder he laughed at the notion of a voucher being wanted for any Macleod of Dare.

One morning a good-looking and slim young man knocked at the door of a small house in Bury Street, St. James's, and asked if Sir Keith Macleod was at home. The servant said he was; and the young gentleman entered. He was a most correctly-dressed person. His hat, and gloves, and cane, and long-tailed frock-coat were all beautiful; but it was perhaps the tightness of his nether garments or perhaps the tightness of his brilliantly polished boots (which were partially covered by white gaiters) that made him go up the narrow little stairs with some precision of caution. The door was opened and he was announced.

"My dear old boy," said he, "how do you do?"—and Macleod gave him a grip of the hand that nearly burst one of his gloves.

But at this moment an awful accident occurred. From behind the door of the adjacent bedroom Oscar the collie sprang forward with an angry growl; then he seemed to recognise the situation of affairs when he saw his master holding the stranger's hand; then he began to wag his tail; then he jumped up with his forepaws to give a kindly welcome.

"Hang it all, Macleod!" young Ogilvie cried, with all the precision gone out of his manner. "Your dog's all wet! What's the use of keeping a brute like that about the place?"

Alas! the beautiful, brilliant boots were all besmeared, and the white gaiters too, and the horsy-looking nether garments. Moreover, the Highland savage, so far from betraying compunction, burst into a roar of laughter.

"My dear fellow," he cried, "I put him in my bedroom to dry: I couldn't do more—could I? He has just been in the Serpentine."

"I wish he was there now, with a stone and a string round his neck," observed Lieutenant Ogilvie, looking at his boots; but he repented him of this rash saying, for within a week he

had offered Macleod twenty pounds for the dog. He might have offered twenty dozen of twenty pounds, and thrown his polished boots and his gaiters too into the bargain, and he would have had the same answer.

Oscar was once more banished into the bedroom; and Mr. Ogilvie sat down, pretending to take no more notice of his boots. Macleod put some sherry on the table and a handful of cigars; his friend asked whether he could not have a glass of seltzer-water and a cigarette.

"And how do you like the rooms I got for you?"

"There is not much fresh air about them, nor in this narrow street," Macleod said frankly, "but that is no matter, for I have been out all day—all over London."

"I thought the price was as high as you would care to go," Ogilvie said, "but I forgot you had come fresh up, with your pockets full of money. If you would like something a trifle more princely, I'll put you up to it."

"And where have I got the money? There are no gold mines in the west of Mull. It is you who are Fortunatus."

"By Jove, if you knew how hard a fellow is run at Aldershot!" Mr. Ogilvie remarked confidentially. "You would scarcely believe it. Every new batch of fellows who come in have to be dined all round; and the mess-bills are simply awful. It's getting worse and worse; and then these big drinks put one off one's work so."

"You are studying hard, I suppose?" Macleod said, quite gravely.

"Pretty well," said he, stretching out his legs, and petting his pretty moustache with his beautiful white hand. Then he added suddenly, surveying the brown-faced and stalwart young fellow before him, "By Jove, Macleod! I'm glad to see you in London. It's like a breath of mountain air. Don't I remember the awful mornings we've had together—the rain and the mist and the creeping through the bogs? I believe you did your best to kill me. If I hadn't had the constitution of a horse I should have been killed."

"I should say your big drinks at Aldershot were more likely to kill you than going after

the deer," said Macleod. "And will you come up with me this autumn, Ogilvie? The mother will be glad to see you, and Janet too; though we haven't got any fine young ladies for you to make love to, unless you go up to Fort William, or Fort George, or Inverness. And I was all over the moors before I came away; and if there is anything like good weather, we shall have plenty of birds this year, for I never saw before such a big average of eggs in the nests."

"I wonder you don't let part of that shooting," said Ogilvie, who knew well of the straitened circumstances of the Macleods of Dare.

"The mother wouldn't have it done," said Macleod, quite simply, "for she thinks it keeps me at home. But a young man cannot always stay at home. It is very good for you, Ogilvie, that you have brothers."

"Yes, if I had been the eldest of them," said Mr. Ogilvie. "It is a capital thing to have younger brothers; it isn't half so pleasant when you are the younger brother."

"And will you come up, then, and bury yourself alive at Dare?"

"It is awfully good of you to ask me, Macleod; and if I can manage it I will; but I am afraid there isn't much chance this year. In the meantime, let me give you a hint. In London, we talk of going *down* to the Highlands."

"Oh, do you? I did not think you were so stupid," Macleod remarked.

"Why, of course we do. You speak of going up to the capital of a country, and of going down to the provinces."

"Perhaps you are right—no doubt you are right; but it sounds stupid," the unconvinced Highlander observed again. "It sounds stupid to say going up to the south, and going down to the north. And how can you go down to the Highlands? you might go down to the Lowlands. But no doubt you are right; and I will be more particular. And will you have another cigarette? and then we will go out for a walk and Oscar will get drier in the street than indoors."

"Don't imagine that I'm going out to have that dog plunging about among my feet," said Ogilvie. "But I have something else for you to do. You know Colonel Ross of Duntorme?"

"I have heard of him."

"His wife is an awfully nice woman, and would like to meet you. I fancy they think of buying some property—I am not sure it isn't an island—in your part of the country; and she has never been to the Highlands at all. I was to take you down with me to lunch with her at two, if you care to go. There is her card."

Macleod looked at the card.

"How far is Prince's Gate from here?" he asked.

"A mile and a half, I should say."

"And it is now twenty minutes to two," said he, rising. "It will be a nice smart walk."

"Thank you," said Mr. Ogilvie, "if it is all the same to you we will perform the journey in a hansom. I am not in training just at present for your tramps to Ben-an-Sloich."

"Ah! your boots are rather tight," said Macleod, with grave sympathy.

They got into a hansom, and went spinning along through the crowd of carriages on this brilliant morning. The busy streets, the handsome women, the fine buildings, the bright and beautiful foliage of the parks—all these were a perpetual wonder and delight to the newcomer, who was as eager in the enjoyment of this gay world of pleasure and activity as any girl come up for her first season. Perhaps this notion occurred to the astute and experienced Lieutenant Ogilvie, who considered it his duty to warn his youthful and ingenuous friend.

"Mrs. Ross is a very handsome woman," he remarked.

"Indeed."

"And uncommonly fascinating too, when she likes."

"Really?"

"You had better look out if she tries to fascinate you."

"She is a married woman," said Macleod.

"They are always the worst," said this wise person; "for they are jealous of the younger women"——

"Oh, that is all nonsense," said Macleod, bluntly. "I am not such a greenhorn. I have read all that kind of talk in books and magazines —it is ridiculous. Do you think I will believe that married women have so little self-respect as to make themselves the laughing-stock of men?"

"My dear fellow, they have cart-loads of self-respect. What I mean is, that Mrs. Ross is a bit of a lion-hunter; and she may take a fancy to make a lion of you"——

"That is better than to make an ass of me, as you suggested."

"And naturally she will try to attach you to her set. I don't think you are quite *outré* enough for her; perhaps I made a mistake in putting you into decent clothes. You wouldn't have time to get into your kilt now? But you must be prepared to meet all sorts of queer folks at her house—especially if you stay on a bit and have some tea—mysterious poets that nobody ever heard of, and artists who won't exhibit, and awful swells from the German Universities, and I don't know what besides—everybody who isn't the least like anybody else."

"And what is your claim, then, to go there?" Macleod asked.

"Oh," said the young lieutenant, laughing at the home-thrust, "I am only admitted on sufferance, as a friend of Colonel Ross. She never asked *me* to put my name in her autograph book. But I have done a bit of the jackal for her once or twice, when I happened to be on leave; and she has sent me with people to her box at Covent Garden when she couldn't go herself."

"And how am I to propitiate her? What am I to do?"

"She will soon let you know how you strike her. Either she will pet you, or she will snuff you out like winking. I don't know a woman who has a blanker stare, when she likes."

This idle conversation was suddenly interrupted. At the same moment both young men experienced a sinking sensation, as if the earth had been cut away from beneath their feet; then there was a crash, and they were violently thrown against each other; then they vaguely knew that the cab, heeling over, was being jolted

along the street by a runaway horse. Fortunately the horse could not run very fast; for the axle-tree, deprived of its wheel, was tearing at the road; but all the same the occupants of the cab thought they might as well get out, and so they tried to force open the two small panels of the door in front of them. But the concussion had so jammed these together that, shove at them as they might, they would not yield. At this juncture, Macleod, who was not accustomed to hansom cabs, and did not at all like this first experience of them, determined to get out somehow; and so he raised himself a bit, so as to get his back firm against the back of the vehicle; he pulled up his leg until his knee almost touched his mouth; he got the heel of his boot firmly fixed on the top edge of the door; and then with one forward drive he tore the panel right away from its hinges. The other was, of course, flung open at once. Then he grasped the brass rail outside, steadied himself for a moment, and jumped clear from the cab, alighting on the pavement. Strange to say, Ogilvie did not follow; though Macleod, as he

rushed along to try to get hold of the horse, momentarily expected to see him jump out. His anxiety was of short duration. The axle-tree caught on the curb; there was a sudden lurch; and then, with a crash of glass, the cab went right over, throwing down the horse and pitching the driver into the street. It was all the work of a few seconds, and another second seemed to suffice to collect a crowd, even in this quiet part of Kensington. But after all very little damage was done, except to the horse, which had cut one of its hocks. When young Mr. Ogilvie scrambled out and got on to the pavement, instead of being grateful that his life had been spared, he was in a towering passion—with whom or what he knew not.

"Why didn't you jump out?" said Macleod to him, after seeing that the cabman was all right.

Ogilvie did not answer; he was looking at his besmeared hands and dishevelled clothes.

"Confound it," said he, "what's to be done now? The house is just round the corner."

"Let us go in and they will lend you a clothes-brush."

"As if I had been fighting a bargee? No, thank you. I will go along till I find some tavern, and get myself put to rights."

And this he did, gloomily; Macleod accompanying him. It was about a quarter of an hour before he had completed his toilet; and then they set out to walk back to Prince's Gate. Mr. Ogilvie was in a better humour.

"What a fellow you are to jump, Macleod!" said he. "If you had cannoned against that policeman, you would have killed him. And you never paid the cabman for destroying the lid of the door; you prized the thing clean off its hinges. You must have the strength of a giant."

"But where the people came from, it was that surprised me," said Macleod, who seemed to have rather enjoyed the adventure, "it was like one of our sea-lochs in the Highlands—you look all round and cannot find any gull anywhere—but throw a biscuit or two into the water, and you will find them appearing

from all quarters at once. As for the door, I forgot that; but I gave the man half-a-sovereign to console him for his shaking. Was not that enough?"

"We shall be frightfully late for luncheon," said Mr. Ogilvie, with some concern.

CHAPTER III.

FIONAGHAL.

And indeed when they entered the house —the balconies and windows were a blaze of flowers all shining in the sun — they found that their host and hostess had already come down stairs and were seated at table with their small party of guests. This circumstance did not lessen Sir Keith Macleod's trepidation; for there is no denying the fact that the young man would rather have faced an angry bull on a Highland road than this party of people in the hushed and semi-darkened and flower-scented room. It seemed to him that his appearance was the signal for a confusion that was equivalent to an earthquake. Two or three servants — all more solemn than any clergyman—began to make new arrangements;

a tall lady, benign of aspect, rose and most graciously received him; a tall gentleman, with a grey moustache, shook hands with him; and then, as he vaguely heard young Ogilvie, at the other end of the room, relate the incident of the upsetting of the cab, he found himself seated next to this benign lady, and apparently in a bewildering Paradise of beautiful lights and colours and delicious odours. Asparagus soup? Yes, he would take that; but for a second or two this spacious and darkened room, with its stained glass and its sombre walls, and the table before him, with its masses of roses and lilies of the valley, its silver, its crystal, its nectarines, and cherries, and pine-apples, seemed some kind of enchanted place. And then the people talked in a low and hushed fashion; and the servants moved silently and mysteriously; and the air was languid with the scents of fruits and flowers. They gave him some wine in a tall green glass that had transparent lizards crawling up its stem; he had never drunk out of a thing like that before.

"It was very kind of Mr. Ogilvie to get you to come; he is a very good boy; he forgets nothing," said Mrs. Ross to him; and as he became aware that she was a pleasant-looking lady of middle age, who regarded him with very friendly and truthful eyes, he vowed to himself that he would bring Mr. Ogilvie to task for representing this decent and respectable woman as a graceless and dangerous coquette. No doubt she was the mother of children. At her time of life she was better employed in the nursery or in the kitchen than in flirting with young men; and could he doubt that she was a good house-mistress when he saw with his own eyes how spick and span everything was, and how accurately everything was served? Even if his cousin Janet lived in the south, with all these fine flowers and hot-house fruits to serve her purpose, she could not have done better. He began to like this pleasant-eyed woman, though she seemed delicate and a trifle languid, and in consequence he sometimes could not quite make out what she said. But then he noticed

that the other people talked in this limp fashion too: there was no precision about their words; frequently they seemed to leave you to guess the end of their sentences. As for the young lady next him, was she not very delicate also? He had never seen such hands—so small, and fine, and white. And although she talked only to her neighbour on the other side of her, he could hear that her voice, low and musical as it was, was only a murmur.

"Miss White and I," said Mrs. Ross to him—and at this moment the young lady turned to them—"were talking before you came in of the beautiful country you must know so well, and of its romantic stories and associations with Prince Charlie. Gertrude, let me introduce Sir Keith Macleod to you. I told Miss White you might come to us to-day; and she was saying what a pity it was that Flora Macdonald was not a Macleod."

"That was very kind," said he, frankly, turning to this tall, pale girl, with the rippling hair of golden-brown and the heavy-lidded and downcast eyes. And then he

laughed. "We would not like to steal the honour from a woman, even though she was a Macdonald; and you know the Macdonalds and the Macleods were not very friendly in the old time. But we can claim something, too, about the escape of Prince Charlie, Mrs. Ross. After Flora Macdonald had got him safe from Harris to Skye, she handed him over to the sons of Macleod of Raasay, and it was owing to them that he got to the mainland. You will find many people up there to this day who believe that if Macleod of Macleod had gone out in '45 Prince Charlie would never have had to flee at all. But I think the Macleods had done enough for the Stuarts; and it was but little thanks they ever got in return, so far as I could ever hear. Do you know, Mrs. Ross, my mother wears mourning every 3rd of September, and will eat nothing from morning till night? It is the anniversary of the Battle of Worcester; and then the Macleods were so smashed up that for a long time the other clans relieved them from military service."

"You are not much of a Jacobite, Sir Keith?" said Mrs. Ross, smiling.

"Only when I hear a Jacobite song sung," said he. "Then who can fail to be a Jacobite?"

He had become quite friendly with this amiable lady. If he had been afraid that his voice, in these delicate southern ears, must sound like the first guttural drone of Donald's pipes at Castle Dare, he had speedily lost that fear. The manly, sun-browned face and clear-glancing eyes were full of animation; he was oppressed no longer by the solemnity of the servants; so long as he talked to her he was quite confident; he had made friends with this friendly woman. But he had not as yet dared to address the pale girl who sat on his right, and who seemed so fragile, and beautiful, and distant in manner.

"After all," said he to Mrs. Ross, "there were no more Highlanders killed in the cause of the Stuarts than used to be killed every year or two merely out of the quarrels of the clans among themselves. All about where I

live there is scarcely a rock or a loch or an island that has not its story. And I think," added he, with a becoming modesty, "that the Macleods were by far the most treacherous, and savage, and bloodthirsty of the whole lot of them."

And now the fair stranger beside him addressed him for the first time; and as she did so she turned her eyes towards him—clear, large eyes that rather startled one when the heavy lids were lifted, so full of expression were they.

"I suppose," said she, with a certain demure smile, "you have no wild deeds done there now?"

"Oh, we have become quite peaceable folks now," said he, laughing. "Our spirit is quite broken. The wild boars are all away from the islands now, even from Muick. We have only the sheep. And the Mackenzies, and the Macleans, and the Macleods—they are all sheep now."

Was it not quite obvious? How could any one associate with this bright-faced young man

the fierce traditions of hate, and malice, and revenge, that make the seas and islands of the north still more terrible in their loneliness? Those were the days of strong wills and strong passions, and of an easy disregard of individual life when the gratification of some set desire was near. What had this Macleod to do with such scorching fires of hate and of love? He was playing with a silver fork and half-a-dozen strawberries: Miss White's surmise was perfectly natural and correct.

The ladies went up stairs; and the men, after the claret had gone round, followed them. And now it seemed to this rude Highlander that he was only going from wonder to wonder. Half-way up the narrow staircase was a large recess, dimly lit by the sunlight falling through stained glass; and there was a small fountain playing in the middle of this grotto; and all around was a wilderness of ferns dripping with the spray, while at the entrance two stone figures held up magical globes, on which the springing and falling

water was reflected. Then from this partial gloom he emerged into the drawing-room — a dream of rose-pink and gold; with the air sweetened around him by the masses of roses and tall lilies about. His eyes were rather bewildered at first; the figures of the women seemed dark against the white lace of the windows. But as he went forward to his hostess he could make out still further wonders of colour: for in the balconies outside, in the full glare of the sun, were geraniums and lobelias and golden calceolarias and red snapdragon; their bright hues faintly tempered by the thin curtains through which they were seen. He could not help expressing his admiration of these things that were so new to him; for it seemed to him that he had come into a land of perpetual summer and sunshine and glowing flowers. Then the luxuriant greenness of the foliage on the other side of Exhibition Road—for Mrs. Ross's house faced westward — was, as he said, singularly beautiful to one accustomed to the windy skies of the western isles.

"But you have not seen our elm," said Mrs. Ross, who was arranging some azaleas that had just been sent her. "We are very proud of our elm. Gertrude, will you take Sir Keith to see our noble elm?"

He had almost forgotten who Gertrude was; but the next second he recognized the low and almost timid voice that said—

"Will you come this way, then, Sir Keith?"

He turned, and found that it was Miss White who spoke. How was it that this girl, who was only a girl, seemed to do things so easily, and gently, and naturally—without any trace of embarrassment or self-consciousness? He followed her, and knew not which to admire the more—the careless simplicity of her manner, or the singular symmetry of her tall and slender figure. He had never seen any statue or any picture in any book to be compared with this woman, who was so fine and rare and delicate that she seemed only a beautiful tall flower in this garden of flowers. There was a strange simplicity, too, about her dress—a plain, tight-fitting, tight-sleeved dress of unrelieved black; her only

adornment being some bands of big blue beads worn loosely round the neck. The black figure, in this shimmer of rose-pink and gold and flowers, was effective enough; but even the finest of pictures, or the finest of statues, has not the subtle attraction of a graceful carriage. Macleod had never seen any woman walk as this woman walked, in so stately and yet so simple a way.

From Mrs. Ross's chief drawing-room they passed into an ante-drawing-room, which was partly a passage and partly a conservatory. On the window-side were some rows of Cape heaths; on the wall-side some rows of blue and white plates; and it was one of the latter that was engaging the attention of two persons in this ante-room—Colonel Ross himself, and a little old gentleman in gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Shall I introduce you to my father?" said Miss White to her companion; and, after a word or two, they passed on.

"I think papa is invaluable to Colonel Ross," said she; "he is as good as an auctioneer at telling the value of china. Look at this

beautiful heath. Mrs. Ross is very proud of her heaths."

The small white fingers scarcely touched the beautiful blossoms of the plant; but which were the more palely roseate and waxen? If one were to grasp that hand—in some sudden moment of entreaty—in the sharp joy of reconciliation—in the agony of farewell—would it not be crushed like a frail flower?

"There is our elm," said she, lightly. "Mrs. Ross and I regard it as our own; we have sketched it so often."

They had emerged from the conservatory into a small square room, which was practically a continuation of the drawing-room, but which was decorated in pale blue and silver, and filled with a lot of knick-knacks that showed it was doubtless Mrs. Ross's boudoir. And out there, in the clear June sunshine, lay the broad greensward behind Prince's Gate, with the one splendid elm spreading his broad branches into the blue sky, and throwing a soft shadow on the corner of the gardens next to the house. How sweet and still it was! as still as the calm clear light in

this girl's eyes. There was no passion there, and no trouble; only the light of a June day, and of blue skies, and a peaceful soul. She rested the tips of her fingers on a small rosewood table that stood by the window: surely, if a spirit ever lived in any table, the wood of this table must have thrilled to its core.

And had he given all this trouble to this perfect creature merely that he should look at a tree?—and was he to say some ordinary thing about an ordinary elm to tell her how grateful he was?

"It is like a dream to me," he said, honestly enough, "since I came to London. You seem always to have sunlight and plenty of fine trees and hothouse flowers. But I suppose you have winter, like the rest of us?"

"Or we should very soon tire of all this, beautiful as it is," said she, and she looked rather wistfully out on the broad still gardens. "For my part, I should very soon tire of it. I should think there was more excitement in the wild storms and the dark nights of the north. There must be a strange fascination in the short winter days among the

mountains, and the long winter nights by the side of the Atlantic."

He looked at her. That fierce fascination he knew something of: how had she guessed at it? And as for her talking as if she herself would gladly brave these storms—was it for a foam-bell to brave a storm? was it for a rose-leaf to meet the driving rains of Ben-an-Sloich?

"Shall we go back, now?" said she; and as she turned to lead the way he could not fail to remark how shapely her neck was, for her rich golden-brown hair was loosely gathered up behind.

But just at this moment Mrs. Ross made her appearance.

"Come," said she, "we shall have a chat all to ourselves; and you will tell me, Sir Keith what you have seen since you came to London, and what has struck you most. And you must stay with us, Gertrude; perhaps Sir Keith will be so kind as to freeze your blood with another horrible story about the Highlanders—I am only a poor southerner and have to get up my legends from books—but this wicked girl, Sir Keith,

delights as much in stories of bloodshed as a schoolboy does."

"You will not believe her," said Miss White, in that low-toned gravely sincere voice of hers, while a faint shell-like pink suffused her face. "It was only that we were talking of the Highlands, because we understood you were coming; and Mrs. Ross was trying to make out"—and here a spice of proud mischief came into the ordinarily calm eyes—"she was trying to make out that you must be a very terrible and dangerous person, who would probably murder us all if we were not civil to you."

"Well, you know, Sir Keith," said Mrs. Ross, apologetically, "you acknowledge yourself that you Macleods were a very dreadful lot of people at one time. What a shame it was to track the poor fellow over the snow, and then deliberately to put brushwood in front of the cave, and then suffocate whole two hundred persons at once!"

"Oh, yes, no doubt," said he, "but the Macdonalds were asked first to give up the men that had bound the Macleods hand and foot and set them adrift in the boat; and they would not do

it. And if the Macdonalds had got the Macleods into a cave, they would have suffocated them too. The Macdonalds began it."

"Oh, no, no, no!" protested Mrs. Ross, "I can remember better than that. What were the Macleods about on the island at all when they had to be sent off, tied hand and foot, in their boats?"

"And what is the difference between tying a man hand and foot and putting him out in the Atlantic, and suffocating him in a cave? It was only by an accident that the wind drifted them over to Skye."

"I shall begin to fear that you have some of the old blood in you," said Mrs. Ross, with a smile, "if you try to excuse one of the cruellest things ever heard of."

"I do not excuse it at all," said he, simply. "It was very bad—very cruel. But perhaps the Macleods were not so much worse than others. It was not a Macleod at all, it was a Gordon—and she a woman, too—that killed the chief of the Mackintoshes after she had received him as a friend. 'Put your head down on the table,'

said she to the chief, 'in token of your submission to the Earl of Huntly.' And no sooner had he bowed his neck, than she whipped out a knife and cut his head off. That was a Gordon; not a Macleod. And I do not think the Macleods were so much worse than their neighbours, after all."

"Oh, how can you say that?" exclaimed his persecutor. "Who was ever guilty of such an act of treachery as setting fire to the barn at Dunvegan? Macdonald and his men get driven on to Skye by the bad weather; they beg for shelter from their old enemy; Macleod professes to be very great friends with them; and Macdonald is to sleep in the castle, while his men have a barn prepared for them. You know very well, Sir Keith, that if Macdonald had remained that night in Dunvegan Castle he would have been murdered; and if the Macleod girl had not given a word of warning to her sweetheart the men in the barn would have been burnt to death. I think if I were a Macdonald I should be proud of that scene—the Macdonalds marching down to their boats with their pipes playing,

while the barn was all in a blaze, fired by their treacherous enemies. Oh, Sir Keith, I hope there are no Macleods of that sort alive now!"

"There are not, Mrs. Ross," said he gravely. "They were all killed by the Macdonalds, I suppose."

"I do believe," said she, "that it was a Macleod who built a stone tower on a lonely island, and imprisoned his wife there——"

"Miss White," the young man said, modestly, "will not you help me? Am I to be made responsible for all the evil doings of my ancestors?"

"It is really not fair, Mrs. Ross," said she; and the sound of this voice pleading for him went to his heart: it was not as the voice of other women.

"I only meant to punish you," said Mrs. Ross, "for having traversed the indictment—I don't know whether that is the proper phrase, or what it means, but it sounds well. You first acknowledged that the Macleods were by far the most savage of the people living up there, and then you tried to make out that the poor creatures

whom they harried were as cruel as themselves."

"What is cruel now was not cruel then," he said; "it was a way of fighting; it was what is called an ambush now—enticing your enemy, and then taking him at a disadvantage. And if you did not do that to him he would do it to you. And when a man is mad with anger or revenge, what does he care for anything?"

"I thought we were all sheep now?" said she.

"Do you know the story of the man who was flogged by Maclean of Lochbuy—that is in Mull," said he, not heeding her remark. "You do not know that old story?"

They did not; and he proceeded to tell it, in a grave and simple fashion which was sufficiently impressive. For he was talking to these two friends now in the most unembarrassed way; and he had, besides, the chief gift of a born narrator—an utter forgetfulness of himself. His eyes rested quite naturally on their eyes as he told his tale. But first of all, he spoke of the exceeding loyalty of the Highland folk to the

head of their clan. Did they know that other story of how Maclean of Duart tried to capture the young heir of the house of Lochbuy, and how the boy was rescued and carried away by his nurse? And when, arrived at man's estate, he returned to revenge himself on those who had betrayed him, among them was the husband of the nurse. The young chief would have spared the life of this man, for the old woman's sake. "*Let the tail go with the hide,*" said she, and he was slain with the rest. And then the narrator went on to the story of the flogging. He told them how Maclean of Lochbuy was out after the deer one day; and his wife, with her child, had come out to see the shooting. They were driving the deer; and at a particular pass a man was stationed so that, should the deer come that way, he should turn them back. The deer came to this pass; the man failed to turn them; the chief was mad with rage. He gave orders that the man's back should be bared, and that he should be flogged before all the people.

"Very well," continued Macleod. "It was done. But it is not safe to do anything like

that to a Highlander; at least it *was* not safe to do anything like that to a Highlander in those days; for, as I told you, Mrs. Ross, we are all like sheep now. Then they went after the deer again; but at one moment the man that had been flogged seized Maclean's child from the nurse, and ran with it across the mountain-side, till he reached a place overhanging the sea. And he held out the child over the sea; and it was no use that Maclean begged on his knees for forgiveness. Even the passion of loyalty was lost now in the fierceness of revenge. This was what the man said—that unless Maclean had his back bared there and then before all the people, and flogged as he had been flogged, then the child should be dashed into the sea below. There was nothing to be done but that—no prayers, no offers, no appeals from the mother were of any use. And so it was that Maclean of Lochbuy was flogged there, before his own people; and his enemy above looking on. And then? When it was over, the man called out aloud, 'Revenged! Revenged!' and sprang into the air with the child along with him; and

neither of them was ever seen again after they had sunk into the sea. It is an old story."

An old story, doubtless, and often told; but its effect on this girl sitting beside him was strange. Her clasped hands trembled; her eyes were glazed and fascinated as if by some spell. Mrs. Ross, noticing this extreme tension of feeling, and fearing it, hastily rose.

"Come, Gertrude," she said, taking the girl by the hand, "we shall be frightened to death by these stories. Come and sing us a song—a French song, all about tears, and fountains, and bits of ribbon—or we shall be seeing the ghosts of murdered Highlanders coming in here in the daytime."

Macleod, not knowing what he had done, but conscious that something had occurred, followed them into the drawing-room, and retired into a sofa while Miss White sat down to the open piano. He hoped he had not offended her. He would not frighten her again with any ghastly stories from the wild northern seas.

And what was this French song that she was about to sing? The pale slender fingers were

wandering over the keys; and there was a sound —faint and clear and musical—as of the rippling of distant summer waves. And sometimes the sounds came nearer; and now he fancied he recognised some old familiar strain; and he thought of his cousin Janet somehow; and of summer days down by the blue waters of the Atlantic. A French song? Surely if this air, that seemed to come nearer and nearer, was blown from any earthly land, it had come from the valleys of Locheil and Ardgour and from the still shores of Arisaig and Moidart? Oh, yes; it was a very pretty French song that she had chosen to please Mrs. Ross with.

"A wee bird came to our ha' door,"

—this was what she sang; and though, to tell the truth, she had not much of a voice, it was exquisitely trained, and she sang with a tenderness and expression such as he, at least, had never heard before—

"He warbled sweet and clearly;
An' aye the o'ercome o' his sang
Was 'Wae's me for Prince Charlie!'

Oh! when I heard the bonnie, bonnie bird,
The tears cam' drappin' rarely;
I took my bonnet off my head,
For well I lo'ed Prince Charlie."

It could not have entered into his imagination to believe that such pathos could exist apart from the actual sorrow of the world. The instrument before her seemed to speak; and the low, joint cry was one of infinite grief and longing and love.

"Quoth I, 'My bird, my bonnie, bonnie bird,
Is that a sang ye borrow?
Are these some words ye've learnt by heart,
Or a lilt o' dool an' sorrow?'

'Oh, no, no, no!' the wee bird sang,
'I've flown sin' mornin' early;
But sic a day o' wind and rain—
Oh, wae's me for Prince Charlie!'"

Mrs. Ross glanced archly at him when she discovered what sort of French song it was that Miss White had chosen; but he paid no heed. His only thought was—"*If only*

the mother and Janet could hear this strange singing!"

When she had ended, Mrs. Ross came over to him and said—

"That is a great compliment to you."

And he answered, simply—

"I have never heard any singing like that."

Then young Mr. Ogilvie—whose existence, by the way, he had entirely and most ungratefully forgotten—came up to the piano; and began to talk in a very pleasant and amusing fashion to Miss White. She was turning over the leaves of the book before her; and Macleod grew angry with this idle interference. Why should this lily-fingered jackanapes — whom a man could wind round a reel and throw out of window — disturb the rapt devotion of this beautiful Saint Cecilia?

She struck a firmer chord; the bystanders withdrew a bit; and of a sudden it seemed to him that all the spirit of all the clans was ringing in the proud fervour of this fragile girl's voice. Whence had she got this fierce Jacobite passion that thrilled him to the very finger-tips?

"I'll to Lochiel, and Appin, and kneel to them,
Down by Lord Murray and Roy of Kildarlie:
Brave Mackintosh, he shall fly to the field wi' them;
These are the lads I can trust wi' my Charlie!"

Could any man fail to answer? Could any man die otherwise than gladly if he died with such an appeal ringing in his ears? Macleod did not know there was scarcely any more volume in this girl's voice now than when she was singing the plaintive wail that preceded it: it seemed to him that there was the strength of the tread of armies in it; and a challenge that could rouse a nation.

"Down through the Lowlands, down wi' the Whigamore!
Loyal true Highlanders, down wi' them rarely!
Ronald and Donald, drive on wi' the broad claymore
Over the necks of the foes of Prince Charlie!
Follow thee! Follow thee! Wha wadna follow thee,
King o' the Highland hearts, bonnie Prince Charlie!"

She shut the book, with a light laugh, and left the piano. She came over to where Macleod sat. When he saw that she meant to speak to him, he rose, and stood before her.

"I must ask your pardon," said she, smiling, "for singing two Scotch songs; for I know the pronunciation is very difficult."

He answered with no idle compliment—

"If *Tearlach ban og*, as they used to call him, were alive now," said he—and indeed there was never any Stuart of them all, not even the Fair Young Charles himself, who looked more handsome than this same Macleod of Dare who now stood before her—"you would get him more men to follow him than any flag or standard he ever raised."

She cast her eyes down.

Mrs. Ross's guests began to leave.

"Gertrude," said she, "will you drive with me for half an hour?—the carriage is at the door. And I know the gentlemen want to have a cigar in the shade of Kensington Gardens: they might come back and have a cup of tea with us."

But Miss White had some engagement; she and her father left together; and the young men followed them almost directly—Mrs. Ross saying that she would be most pleased to see Sir Keith

Macleod any Tuesday or Thursday afternoon he happened to be passing, as she was always at home on these days.

"I don't think we can do better than take her advice about the cigar," said young Ogilvie, as they crossed to Kensington Gardens. "What do you think of her?"

"Of Mrs. Ross?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I think she is a very pleasant woman."

"Yes, but——" said Mr. Ogilvie, "how did she strike you? Do you think she is as fascinating as some men think her?"

"I don't know what men think about her," said Macleod. "It never occurred to me to ask whether a married woman was fascinating or not. I thought she was a friendly woman—talkative, amusing, clever enough."

They lit their cigars in the cool shadow of the great elms: who does not know how beautiful Kensington Gardens are in June? And yet Macleod did not seem disposed to be garrulous about these new experiences of his; he was absorbed, and mostly silent.

"That is an extraordinary fancy she has taken for Gertrude White," Mr. Ogilvie remarked.

"Why extraordinary?" the other asked, with sudden interest.

"Oh, well, it is unusual, you know; but she is a nice girl enough, and Mrs. Ross is fond of odd folks. You didn't speak to old White?—his head is a sort of British Museum of antiquities; but he is of some use to these people—he is such a swell about old armour, and china, and such things. They say he wants to be sent out to dig for Dido's funeral pyre at Carthage, and that he is only waiting to get the trinkets made at Birmingham."

They walked on a bit in silence.

"I think you made a good impression on Mrs. Ross," said Mr. Ogilvie, coolly. "You'll find her an uncommonly useful woman, if she takes a fancy to you; for she knows everybody and goes everywhere, though her own house is too small to let her entertain properly. By the way, Macleod, I don't think you could have hit on a worse fellow than I to take you about; for I

am so little in London that I have become a rank outsider. But I'll tell you what I'll do for you if you will go with me to-night to Lord Beauregard's who is an old friend of mine. I will ask him to introduce you to some people — and his wife gives very good dances — and if any Royal or Imperial swell comes to town you'll be sure to run against him there. I forget who it is they are receiving there to-night; but anyhow you'll meet two or three of the fat duchesses whom Dizzy adores; and I shouldn't wonder if that Irish girl were there—the new beauty: Lady Beauregard is very clever at picking people up."

"Will Miss White be there?" Macleod asked, apparently deeply engaged in probing the end of his cigar.

His companion looked up in surprise: then a new fancy seemed to occur to him; and he smiled very slightly.

"Well, no," said he slowly, "I don't think she will. In fact, I am almost sure she will be at the Piccadilly Theatre. If you like, we will

give up Lady Beauregard, and after dinner go to the Piccadilly Theatre instead. How will that do?"

"I think that will do very well," said Macleod.

CHAPTER IV.

WONDER-LAND.

A COOL evening in June—the club-windows open—a clear twilight shining over Pall Mall—and a *tête-à-tête* dinner at a small clean, bright table: these are not the conditions in which a young man should show impatience. And yet the cunning dishes which Mr. Ogilvie, who had a certain pride in his club, though it was only one of the junior institutions, had placed before his friend, met with but scant curiosity: Macleod would rather have handed questions of cookery over to his cousin Janet. Nor did he pay much heed to his companion's sage advice as to the sort of club he should have himself proposed at, with a view to getting elected in a dozen or fifteen years; a young man is apt to let his life at forty shift for itself.

"You seem very anxious to see Miss White again," said Mr. Ogilvie, with a slight smile.

"I wish to make all the friends I can while I am in London," said Macleod. "What shall I do in this howling wilderness when you go back to Aldershot?"

"I don't think Miss Gertrude White will be of much use to you. Colonel Ross may be. Or Lord Beauregard. But you cannot expect young ladies to take you about."

"No?" said Macleod gravely, "that is a great pity."

Mr. Ogilvie, who, with all his knowledge of the world, and of wines, and cookery, and women, and what not, had sometimes an uneasy consciousness that his companion was covertly laughing at him, here proposed that they should have a cigar before walking up to the Piccadilly Theatre; but as it was now ten minutes to eight, Macleod resolutely refused. He begged to be considered a country person, anxious to see the piece from the beginning. And so they put on their light top-coats over their evening dress and walked up to the theatre.

A distant sound of music; an odour of escaped gas; a perilous descent of a corkscrew staircase; a drawing aside of heavy curtains; and then a blaze of yellow light shining within this circular building, on its red satin and gilt plaster, and on the spacious picture of a blue Italian lake, with peacocks on the wide stone terraces. The noise at first was bewildering. The leader of the orchestra was sawing away at his violin as savagely as if he were calling on his company to rush up and seize a battery of guns. What was the melody that was being banged about by the trombones, and blared aloud by the shrill cornets, and sawed across by the infuriated violins? "*When the heart of a man is oppressed with care*"? The cure was never insisted on with such an angry vehemence.

Recovering from the first shock of the fierce noise, Macleod began to look around this strange place, with its magical colours and its profusion of gilding; but nowhere in the half-empty stalls or behind the lace curtains of the boxes, could he make out the visitor of whom he was in search. Perhaps she was not coming, then? Had he

sacrificed the evening all for nothing? As regarded the theatre, or the piece to be played, he had not the slightest interest in either. The building was very pretty, no doubt; but it was only, in effect, a superior sort of booth; and as for the trivial amusement of watching a number of people strut across a stage and declaim—or perhaps make fools of themselves to raise a laugh—that was not at all to his liking. It would have been different had he been able to talk to the girl who had shown such a strange interest in the gloomy stories of the northern seas; perhaps, though he would scarcely have admitted this to himself, it might have been different if only he had been allowed to see her at some distance. But her being absent altogether? The more the seats in the stalls were filled—reducing the chances of her coming—the more empty the theatre seemed to become.

"At least we can go along to that house you mentioned," said he to his companion.

"Oh, don't be disappointed yet," said Ogilvie; "I know she will be here."

"With Mrs. Ross?"

"Mrs. Ross comes very often to this theatre. It is the correct thing to do. It is high art. All the people are raving about the chief actress; artists painting her portrait; poets writing sonnets about her different characters; no end of a fuss. And Mrs. Ross is very proud that so distinguished a person is her particular friend"—

"Do you mean the actress?"

"Yes;—and makes her the big feature of her parties at present; and society is rather inclined to make a pet of her too—patronising high art, don't you know? It's wonderful what you can do in that way. If a duke wants a clown to make fellows laugh after a Derby dinner, he gets him to his house, and makes him dance; and if the papers find it out it is only 'raising the moral status of the pantomine.' Of course it is different with Mrs. Ross's friend—she is all right socially."

The garrulous boy was stopped by the sudden cessation of the music; and then the Italian lake and the peacocks disappeared into unknown regions above; and behold! in their place a spacious hall was revealed—not the bare and simple hall at Castle Dare with which Macleod

was familiar—but a grand apartment, filled with old armour, and pictures, and cabinets, and showing glimpses of a balcony and fair gardens beyond. There were two figures in this hall; and they spoke—in the high and curious falsetto of the stage. Macleod paid no more heed to them than if they had been marionettes. For one thing, he could not follow their speech very well; but in any case, what interest could he have in listening to this old lawyer explaining to the stout lady that the family affairs were grievously involved? He was still intently watching the new comers who straggled in, singly or in pairs, to the stalls: when a slight motion of the white curtains showed that some one was entering one of the boxes, the corner of the box was regarded with as earnest a gaze as ever followed the movements of a herd of red-deer in the misty chasms of Ben-an-Sloich. What concern had he in the troubles of this over-dressed and stout lady, who was bewailing her misfortunes and wringing her bejewelled hands?

Suddenly his heart seemed to stand still altogether. It was a light, glad laugh—the

sound of a voice he knew,—that seemed to have pierced him as with a rifle-ball; and at the same moment, from the green shimmer of foliage in the balcony, there stepped into the glare of the hall a young girl with life and laughter and a merry carelessness in her face and eyes. She threw her arm round her mother's neck and kissed her. She bowed to the legal person. She flung her garden-hat on to a couch; and got up on a chair to get fresh seed put in for her canary. It was all done so simply, and naturally, and gracefully, that in an instant a fire of life and reality sprang into the whole of this sham thing. The older woman was no longer a marionette, but the anguish stricken mother of this gay and heedless girl. And when the daughter jumped down from the chair again—her canary on her finger—and when she came forward to pet and caress and remonstrate with her mother—and when the glare of the lights flashed on the merry eyes, and on the white teeth and laughing lips —there was no longer any doubt possible. Macleod's face was quite pale. He took the programme from Ogilvie's hand, and for a minute

or two stared mechanically at the name of Miss Gertrude White printed on the pink tinted paper. He gave it him back without a word. Ogilvie only smiled; he was proud of the surprise he had planned.

And now the fancies and recollections that came rushing into Macleod's head were of a sufficiently chaotic and bewildering character. He tried to separate that grave and gentle and sensitive girl he had met at Prince's Gate from this gay madcap; and he could not at all succeed. His heart laughed with the laughter of this wild creature; he enjoyed the discomfiture and despair of the old lawyer, as she stood before him, twirling her garden-hat by a solitary ribbon; and when the small white fingers raised the canary to be kissed by the pouting lips, the action was more graceful than anything he had ever seen in the world. But where was the silent and serious girl who had listened with such rapt attention to his tales of passion and revenge—who seemed to have some mysterious longing for those gloomy shores he came from—who had sung with such exquisite pathos "A

wee bird cam' to our ha' door"? Her cheek had turned white when she heard of the fate of the son of Maclean: surely that sensitive and vivid imagination could not belong to this audacious girl, with her laughing, and teasings, and demure coquetry?

Society had not been talking about the art of Mrs. Ross's *protégée* for nothing; and that art soon made short work of Keith Macleod's doubts. The fair stranger he had met at Prince's Gate vanished into mist. Here was the real woman; and all the trumpery business of the theatre, that he would otherwise have regarded with indifference or contempt, became a real and living thing; insomuch that he followed the fortunes of this spoiled child with a breathless interest and a beating heart. The spell was on him. Oh, why should she be so proud to this poor lover, who stood so meekly before her? "Coquette! coquette!" (Macleod could have cried to her) "the days are not always full of sunshine; life is not all youth and beauty and high spirits; you may come to repent of your pride and your cruelty." He had no jealousy against the poor

youth who took his leave; he pitied him—but it was for her sake; he seemed to know that evil days were coming, when she would long for the solace of an honest man's love. And when the trouble came—as speedily it did—and when she stood bravely up at first to meet her fate, and when she broke down for a time, and buried her face in her hands, and cried with bitter sobs, the tears were running down his face. Could the merciful Heavens see such grief, and let the wicked triumph! And why was there no man to succour her? Surely some times arise in which the old law is the good law; and a man will trust to his own right arm to put things straight in the world? To look at her—could any man refuse? And now she rises and goes away; and all the glad summer-time and the sunshine have gone; and the cold wind shivers through the trees, and it breathes only of farewell. Farewell, O miserable one! the way is dark before you; and you are alone. Alone, and no man near to help.

Macleod was awakened from his trance. The act-drop was let down; there was a stir

throughout the theatre; young Ogilvie turned to him.

"Don't you see who has come into that corner box up there?"

If he had been told that Miss White, come up from Prince's Gate, in her plain black dress and blue beads, had just arrived and was seated there, he would scarcely have been surprised. As it was, he looked up, and saw Colonel Ross taking his seat, while the figure of a lady was partially visible behind the lace curtain.

"I wonder how often Mrs. Ross has seen this piece!" Ogilvie said. "And I think Colonel Ross is as profound a believer in Miss White as his wife is. Will you go up and see them now?"

"No," Macleod said absently.

"I shall tell them," said the facetious boy, as he rose, and got hold of his crush-hat, "that you are meditating a leap on to the stage, to rescue the distressed damsel."

And then his conscience smote him.

"Mind you," said he, "I think it is awfully good myself. I can't pump up any enthusiasm for most things that people rave about; but I do

think this girl is uncommonly clever. And then she always dresses like a lady."

With this high commendation Lieutenant Ogilvie left, and made his way up stairs to Mrs. Ross's box. Apparently he was well received there; for he did not make his appearance again at the beginning of the next act, nor, indeed, until it was nearly over.

The dream-world opens again; and now it is a beautiful garden, close by the ruins of an old abbey; and fine ladies are walking about there. But what does he care for these marionettes uttering meaningless phrases? They have no more interest for him than the sham ivy on the sham ruins, so long as that one bright, speaking, pathetic face is absent; and the story they are carrying forward is for him no story at all, for he takes no heed of its details in his anxious watching for her appearance. The sides of this garden are mysteriously divided: by which avenue will she approach? Suddenly he hears the low voice —she comes nearer—now let the world laugh again! But alas! when she does appear, it is in the company of her lover; and it is only to bid

him good-bye. Why does the coward hind take her at her word? A stick, a stone, a wave of the cold sea, would be more responsive to that deep and tremulous voice, which has now no longer any of the arts of a wilful coquetry about it, but is altogether as self-revealing as the generous abandonment of her eyes. The poor cipher!—he is not the man to woo and win and carry off this noble woman, the unutterable soul-surrender of whose look has the courage of despair in it. He bids her farewell. The tailor's dummy retires. And she?—in her agony, is there no one to comfort her? They have demanded this sacrifice in the name of duty; and she has consented: ought not that to be enough to comfort her?

Then other people appear, from other parts of the garden; and there is a Babel of tongues. He hears nothing; but he follows that sad face, until he could imagine that he listens to the throbbing of her aching heart.

And then, as the phantasms of the stage come and go, and fortune plays many pranks with these puppets, the piece draws near to an end. And now, as it appears, everything is reversed; and it

is the poor lover who is in grievous trouble, while she is restored to the proud position of her coquetries and wilful graces again, with all her friends smiling around her, and life lying fair before her. She meets him by accident. Suffering gives him a certain sort of dignity; but how is one to retain patience with the blindness of this insufferable ass? Don't you see, man, don't you see that she is waiting to throw herself into your arms? and you, you poor ninny, are giving yourself airs, and assuming the grand heroic! And then the shy coquetry comes in again. The pathetic eyes are full of a grave compassion, if he must really never see her more. The cat plays with the poor mouse, and pretends that really the tender thing is gone away at last. He will take this half of a broken sixpence back: it was given in happier times. If ever he should marry, he will know that one far away prays for his happiness. And if—if these unwomanly tears . . . and suddenly the crass idiot discovers that she is laughing at him; and that she has secured him and bound him as completely as a fly fifty times wound

round by a spider. The crash of applause that accompanied the lowering of the curtain stunned Macleod, who had not quite come back from dream-land. And then, amid a confused roar, the curtain was drawn a bit back, and she was led—timidly smiling, so that her eyes seemed to take in all the theatre at once—across the stage by that same poor fool of a lover; and she had two or three bouquets thrown her, notably one from Mrs. Ross's box. Then she disappeared; and the lights were lowered; and there was a dull shuffling of people getting their cloaks and hats and going away.

"Mrs. Ross wants to see you for a minute," Ogilvie said.

"Yes," Macleod answered absently.

"And we have time yet, if you like, to get into a hansom, and drive along to Lady Beauregard's."

CHAPTER V.

IN PARK LANE.

THEY found Mrs. Ross and her husband waiting in the corridor above.

"Well, how did you like it?" she said.

He could not answer off-hand. He was afraid he might say too much.

"It is like her singing," he stammered at length. "I am not used to these things. I have never seen anything like that before."

"We shall soon have her in a better piece," Mrs. Ross said. "It is being written for her. That is very pretty; but slight. She is capable of greater things."

"She is capable of anything," said Macleod simply, "if she can make you believe that such nonsense is real. I looked at the others. What did they say or do, better than

mere pictures in a book? But she——it is like magic."

"And did Mr. Ogilvie give you my message?" said Mrs. Ross. "My husband and I are going down to see a yacht race on the Thames to-morrow—we did not think of it till this evening any more than we expected to find you here. We came along to try to get Miss White to go with us. Will you join our little party?"

"Oh, yes, certainly—thank you very much," Macleod said eagerly.

"Then you'd better meet us at Charing Cross, at ten sharp," Colonel Ross said; "so don't let Ogilvie keep you up too late with brandy and soda. A special will take us down."

"Brandy and soda!" Mr. Ogilvie exclaimed. "I am going to take him along for a few minutes to Lady Beauregard's—surely that is proper enough; and I have to get down by the 'cold-meat' train to Aldershot, so there won't be much brandy and soda for me. Shall we go now, Mrs. Ross?"

"I am waiting for an answer," Mrs. Ross said, looking along the corridor.

Was it possible, then, that she herself should bring the answer to this message that had been sent her—stepping out of the dream-world in which she had disappeared with her lover? And how would she look as she came along this narrow passage? Like the arch coquette of this land of gaslight and glowing colours? or like the pale, serious, proud girl who was fond of sketching the elm at Prince's Gate? A strange nervousness possessed him as he thought she might suddenly appear. He did not listen to the talk between Colonel Ross and Mr. Ogilvie. He did not notice that this small party was obviously regarded as being in the way by the attendants who were putting out the lights and shutting the doors of the boxes. Then a man came along.

"Miss White's compliments, ma'am; and she will be very pleased to meet you at Charing Cross at ten to-morrow."

"And Miss White is a very brave young lady to attempt anything of the kind," observed Mr. Ogilvie confidentially, as they all went down the stairs. "For if the yachts should get

becalmed off the Nore, or off the Mouse, I wonder how Miss White will get back to London in time?"

"Oh, we shall take care of that," said Colonel Ross. "Unless there is a good steady breeze we shan't go at all; we shall spend a happy day at Rosherville; or have a look at the pictures at Greenwich. We shan't get Miss White into trouble. Good-bye, Ogilvie. Good-bye, Sir Keith. Remember—ten o'clock, Charing Cross."

They stepped into their carriage and drove off.

"Now," said Macleod's companion, "are you tired?"

"Tired! I have done nothing all day."

"Shall we get into a hansom, and drive along to Lady Beauregard's?"

"Certainly, if you like. I suppose they won't throw you over again?"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Ogilvie, as he once more adventured his person in a cab. "And I can tell you it is much better—if you look at the thing philosophically, as poor wretches like you and me must—to drive to a crush in a hansom than in your own carriage. You don't worry about your

horses being kept out in the rain; you can come away at any moment; there is no fussing with servants, and rows because your man has got out of the rank——HOLD UP!"

Whether it was the yell or not, the horse recovered from the slight stumble; and no harm befell the two daring travellers.

"These vehicles give one some excitement," Macleod said—or rather roared, for Piccadilly was full of carriages. "A squall in Loch Scridain is nothing to them."

"You'll get used to them in time," was the complacent answer.

They dismissed the hansom at the corner of Piccadilly, and walked up Park Lane, so as to avoid waiting in the rank of carriages. Macleod accompanied his companion meekly. All this scene around him—the flashing lights of the broughams—the brilliant windows—the stepping across the pavement of a strangely-dressed dignitary from some foreign land—seemed but some other part of that dream from which he had not quite shaken himself free. His head was still full of the sorrows and coquetries of that wild-

spirited heroine. Whither had she gone by this time—away into some strange valley of that unknown world?

He was better able than Mr. Ogilvie to push his way through the crowd of footmen who stood in two lines across the pavement in front of Beauregard House, watching for the first appearance of their master or mistress; but he resignedly followed and found himself in the avenue leading clear up to the steps. They were not the only arrivals, late as the hour was. Two young girls, sisters, clad in cream-white silk with a gold fringe across their shoulders and sleeves, preceded them; and he was greatly pleased by the manner in which these young ladies, on meeting in the great hall an elderly lady who was presumably a person of some distinction, dropped a pretty little old-fashioned curtsy as they shook hands with her. He admired much less the formal obeisance which he noticed a second after. A Royal personage was leaving; and as this lady, who was dressed in mourning, and was leaning on the arm of a gentleman whose coat was blazing with diamond stars, and whose breast was barred

across with a broad blue ribbon, came along the spacious landing at the foot of the wide staircase, she graciously extended her hand and said a few words to such of the ladies standing by as she knew. That deep bending of the knee he considered to be less pretty than the little curtsy performed by the young ladies in cream-white silk. He intended to mention this matter to his cousin Janet.

Then, as soon as the Princess had left, the lane through which she had passed closed up again, and the crowd became a confused mass of murmuring groups. Still meekly following, Macleod plunged into this throng; and presently found himself being introduced to Lady Beauregard, an amiable little woman who had been a great beauty in her time and was pleasant enough to look at now. He passed on.

"Who is the man with the blue ribbon and the diamond stars?" he asked of Mr. Ogilvie.

"That is Monsieur le Marquis himself—that is your host," the young gentleman replied—only Macleod could not tell why he was obviously trying to repress some covert merriment.

"Didn't you hear?" Mr. Ogilvie said at length. "Don't you know what he called you? That man will be the death of me—for he's always at it. He announced you as Sir Thief Macleod—I will swear he did."

"I should not have thought he had so much historical knowledge," Macleod answered gravely. "He must have been reading up about the clans."

At this moment, Lady Beauregard, who had been receiving some other late visitors, came up and said she wished to introduce him to——he could not make out the name. He followed her. He was introduced to a stout elderly lady, who still had beautifully fine features, and a simple and calm air which rather impressed him. It is true that at first a thrill of compassion went through him; for he thought that some accident had befallen the poor lady's costume, and that it had fallen down a bit unknown to herself; but he soon perceived that most of the other women were dressed similarly, some of the younger ones, indeed, having the back of their dress open practically to the waist. He wondered what his mother and Janet would say to this style.

"Don't you think the Princess is looking pale?" he was asked.

"I thought she looked very pretty—I never saw her before," said he.

What next? That calm air was a trifle cold and distant. He did not know who the woman was; or where she lived; or whether her husband had any shooting, or a yacht, or a pack of hounds. What was he to say? He returned to the Princess.

"I only saw her as she was leaving," said he. "We came late. We were at the Piccadilly Theatre."

"Oh, you saw Miss Gertrude White?" said this stout lady; and he was glad to see her eyes light up with some interest. "She is very clever, is she not?—and so pretty and engaging. I wish I knew some one who knew her."

"I know some friends of hers," Macleod said, rather timidly.

"Oh, do you, really? Do you think she would give me a morning performance for my Fund?"

This lady seemed to take it so much for

granted that every one must have heard of her Fund that he dared not confess his ignorance. But it was surely some charitable thing; and how could he doubt that Miss White would immediately respond to such an appeal?

"I should think that she would," said he, with a little hesitation—but at this moment some other claimant came forward, and he turned away to seek young Ogilvie once more.

"Ogilvie," said he, "who is that lady in the green satin?"

"The Duchess of Wexford."

"Has she a Fund?"

"A what?"

"A Fund—a charitable Fund of some sort."

"Oh, let me see. I think she is getting up money for a new training-ship—turning the young ragamuffins about the streets into sailors, don't you know?"

"Do you think Miss White would give a morning performance for that Fund?"

"Miss White! Miss White! Miss White!" said Lieutenant Ogilvie. "I think Miss White has got into your head."

"But that lady asked me."

"Well, I should say it was exactly the thing that Miss White would like to do—get mixed up with a whole string of Duchesses and Marchionesses—a capital advertisement—and it would be all the more distinguished if it was an amateur performance, and Miss Gertrude White the only professional admitted into the charmed circle."

"You are a very shrewd boy, Ogilvie," Macleod observed. "I don't know how you ever got so much wisdom into so small a head."

And indeed, as Lieutenant Ogilvie was returning to Aldershot by what he was pleased to call the cold-meat train, he continued to play the part of Mentor for a time with great assiduity, until Macleod was fairly confused with the number of persons to whom he was introduced and the remarks his friend made about them. What struck him most, perhaps, was the recurrence of old Highland or Scotch family names, borne by persons who were thoroughly English in their speech, and ways. Fancy a Gordon who said "lock" for "loch"; a Mackenzie who

had never seen the Lewis; a Mac Alpine who had never heard the proverb, "The hills, the Mac Alpines, and the devil came into the world at the same time."

It was a pretty scene; and he was young, and eager, and curious; and he enjoyed it. After standing about for half-an-hour or so, he got into a corner from which, in quiet, he could better see the brilliant picture as a whole—the bright, harmonious dresses, the glimpses of beautiful eyes and blooming complexions, the masses of foxgloves which Lady Beauregard had as the only floral decoration of the evening, the pale canary-coloured panels and silver fluted columns of the walls, and over all the various candelabra, each bearing a cluster of sparkling and golden stars. But there was something wanting. Was it the noble and silver-haired lady of Castle Dare whom he looked for in vain in that brilliant crowd that moved and murmured before him? Or was it the friendly and familiar face of his cousin Janet, whose eyes, he knew, would be filled with a constant wonder if she saw such diamonds and silks and

satins? Or was it that *ignis fatuus*—that treacherous and mocking fire—that might at any time glimmer in some suddenly presented face with a new surprise? Had she deceived him altogether down at Prince's Gate? Was her real nature that of the wayward, bright, mischievous, spoiled child whose very tenderness only prepared her unsuspecting victim for a merciless thrust? And yet the sound of her sobbing was still in his ears. A true woman's heart beat beneath that idle raillery: challenged boldly, would it not answer loyally and without fear?

Psychological puzzles were new to this son of the mountains; and it is no wonder that long after he had bidden good-bye to his friend Ogilvie, and as he sate thinking alone in his own room, with Oscar lying across the rug at his feet, his mind refused to be quieted. One picture after another presented itself to his imagination—the proud-souled enthusiast longing for the wild winter nights and the dark Atlantic seas—the pensive maiden, shuddering to hear the fierce story of Maclean of Lochbuy

—the spoiled child, teasing her mamma, and petting her canary—the wronged and weeping woman, her frame shaken with sobs, her hands clasped in despair—the artful and demure coquette, mocking her lover with her sentimental farewells. Which of them all was she? Which should he see in the morning? Or would she appear as some still more elusive vision, retreating before him as he advanced?

Had he asked himself, he would have said that these speculations were but the fruit of a natural curiosity. Why should he not be interested in finding out the real nature of this girl, whose acquaintance he had just made? It has been observed, however, that young gentlemen do not always betray this frantic devotion to psychological inquiry when the subject of it, instead of being a fascinating maiden of twenty, is a homely-featured lady of fifty.

Time passed; another cigar was lit; the blue light outside was becoming silvery; and yet the problem remained unsolved. A fire of impatience and restlessness was burning in

his heart; a din as of brazen instruments—what was the air the furious orchestra played?—was in his ears; sleep or rest was out of the question.

"Oscar!" he called. "Oscar, my lad, let us go out."

When he stealthily went down stairs, and opened the door, and passed into the street, behold! the new day was shining abroad—and how cold, and still, and silent it was after the hot glare and the whirl of that bewildering night! No living thing was visible. A fresh, sweet air stirred the leaves of the trees and bushes in St. James's Square. There was a pale lemon-yellow glow in the sky, and the long empty thoroughfare of Pall Mall seemed coldly white.

Was this a somnambulist, then, who wandered idly along through the silent streets, apparently seeing nothing of the closed doors, and the shuttered windows on either hand? A policeman, standing at the corner of Waterloo Place, stared at the apparition—at the twin apparition; for this tall young gentleman with the light

top-coat thrown over his evening dress was accompanied by a beautiful collie that kept close to his heels. There was a solitary four-wheeled cab at the foot of the Haymarket; but the man had got inside and was doubtless asleep. The Embankment?—with the young trees stirring in the still morning air; and the broad bosom of the river catching the gathering glow of the skies. He leaned on the grey stone parapet, and looked out on the placid waters of the stream.

Placid indeed they were as they went flowing quietly by; and the young day promised to be bright enough; and why should there be aught but peace and goodwill upon earth towards all men and women? Surely there was no call for any unrest, or fear, or foreboding? The still and shining morning was but emblematic of his life—if only he knew, and were content. And indeed he looked contented enough, as he wandered on, breathing the cool freshness of the air, and with a warmer light from the east now touching from time to time his sun-tanned face. He went up to Covent

THE RIVER THAMES.

Garden—for mere curiosity's sake. He walked along Piccadilly, and thought the elms in the Green Park looked more beautiful than ever. When he returned to his rooms, he was of opinion that it was scarcely worth while to go to bed; and so he changed his clothes, and called for breakfast as soon as some one was up. In a short time—after his newspaper had been read—he would have to go down to Charing Cross.

What of this morning walk? Perhaps it was unimportant enough. Only, in after times, he once or twice thought of it; and very clearly, indeed, he could see himself standing there in the early light, looking out on the shining waters of the river. They say that when you see yourself too vividly—when you imagine that you yourself are standing before yourself—that is one of the signs of madness.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUMMER-DAY ON THE THAMES.

It occurred to him as he walked down to the station—perhaps he went early on the chance of finding her there alone—that he ought seriously to study the features of this girl's face; for was there not a great deal of character to be learned, or guessed at, that way? He had but the vaguest notion of what she was really like. He knew that her teeth were pearly white when she smiled, and that the rippling golden-brown hair lay rather low on a calm and thoughtful forehead; but he had a less distinct impression that her nose was perhaps the least thing *retroussée;* and as to her eyes? They might be blue, grey, or green: but one thing he was sure of was that they could speak more than was ever uttered

by any speech. He knew besides that she had an exquisite figure: perhaps it was the fact that her shoulders were a trifle squarer than is common with women that made her look somewhat taller than she really was.

He would confirm or correct these vague impressions. And as the chances were that they would spend a whole long day together, he would have abundant opportunity of getting to know something about the character and disposition of this new acquaintance, so that she should no longer be to him a puzzling and distracting will-o'-the-wisp. What had he come to London for but to improve his knowledge of men and of women, and to see what was going on in the larger world? And so this earnest student walked down to the station.

There were a good many people about, mostly in groups chatting with each other; but he recognised no one. Perhaps he was looking out for Colonel and Mrs. Ross; perhaps for a slender figure in black, with blue beads; at all events he was gazing somewhat vacantly around, when some one turned close by him. Then his

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Was she
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White's face; but
surprise; and
rassed.
Ross," said she,

he found himself
a great deal to her,
begin. She had sur-
as usual. She was so
had been dreaming about.
imaginary creatures that
during the stillness of

the night. Even the pale dreamer in black and blue beads was gone. He found before him (as far as he could make out) a quiet, bright-faced, self-possessed girl, clad in a light and cool costume of white—with bits of black velvet about it—and her white gloves and sunshade, and the white silver chain round her slender waist, were important features in the picture she presented. How could this eager student of character get rid of these distressing trivialities? All night long he had been dreaming of beautiful sentiments and conflicting emotions: now his first thought was that he had never seen any costume so delightfully cool and clear and summer-like. To look at her was to think of a mountain-spring, icy-cold even in the sunshine.

"I always come early," said she, in the most matter-of-fact way. "I cannot bear hurry in catching a train."

Of course not. How could any one associate rattling cabs, and excited porters, and frantic mobs, with this serene creature, who seemed to have been wafted to Charing Cross on a cloud? And if he had had his will, there would have

been no special train to disturb her repose. She would have embarked in a noble barge, and lain upon couches of swan's down, and ample awnings of silk would have sheltered her from the sun, while the beautiful craft floated away down the river, its crimson hangings here and there just touching the rippling waters.

"Ought we to take tickets?"

That was what she actually said; but what those eloquent, innocent eyes seemed to say was, "*Can you read what we have to tell you? Don't you know what a simple and confiding soul appeals to you?—clear as the daylight in its truth. Cannot you look through us and see the trusting, tender soul within?*"

"Perhaps we had better wait for Colonel Ross," said he; and there was a little pronoun in this sentence that he would like to have repeated. It was a friendly word. It established a sort of secret companionship. It is the proud privilege of a man to know all about railway-tickets; but he rather preferred this association with her helpless innocence and ignorance.

"I had no idea you were coming to-day. I rather like those surprise parties. Mrs. Ross never thought of going till last evening, she says. Oh! by the way, I saw you in the theatre last evening."

He almost started. He had quite forgotten that this self-possessed, clear-eyed, pale girl was the madcap coquette whose caprices and griefs had alternately fascinated and moved him on the previous evening.

"Oh, indeed," he stammered. "It was a great pleasure to me—and a surprise. Lieutenant Ogilvie played a trick on me. He did not tell me before we went that—that you were to appear"——

She looked amused.

"You did not know, then, when we met at Mrs. Ross's, that I was engaged at the Piccadilly Theatre?"

"Not in the least," he said, earnestly; as if he wished her distinctly to understand that he could not have imagined such a thing to be possible.

"You should have let me send you a box.

We have another piece in rehearsal. Perhaps you will come to see that?"

Now if these few sentences, uttered by those two young people in the noisy railway station, be taken by themselves and regarded, they will be found to consist of the dullest commonplace, No two strangers in all that crowd could have addressed each other in a more indifferent fashion. But the trivial nothings which the mouth utters may become possessed of awful import when accompanied by the language of the eyes; and the poor commonplace sentences may be taken up and translated, so that they shall stand written across the memory, in letters of flashing sunlight and the colours of June. "*Ought we to take tickets?*" There was not much poetry in the phrase; but she lifted her eyes just then.

And now Colonel Ross and his wife appeared, accompanied by the only other friend they could get at such short notice to join this scratch party—a demure little old lady who had a very large house on Campden Hill which everybody coveted. They were just in time to get

comfortably seated in the spacious saloon-carriage that had been reserved for them. The train slowly glided out of the station; and then began to rattle away from the mist of London. Glimpses of a keener blue began to appear. The gardens were green with the foliage of the early summer; martens swept across the still pools, a spot of white when they got into the shadow. And Miss White would have as many windows open as possible, so that the sweet June air swept right through the long carriage.

And was she not a very child in her enjoyment of this sudden escape into the country? The rapid motion—the silvery light—the sweet air—the glimpses of orchards, and farm houses and mill-streams—all were a delight to her; and although she talked in a delicate, half-reserved, shy way with that low voice of hers, still there was plenty of vivacity and gladness in her eyes. They drove from Gravesend station to the riverside. They passed through the crowd waiting to see the yachts start. They got on board the steamer; and at the very instant that Macleod stepped from the gangway on to the

deck the military band on board—by some strange coincidence—struck up "A Highland lad my love was born." Mrs. Ross laughed; and wondered whether the bandmaster had recognised her husband.

And now they turned to the river; and there were the narrow and shapely cutters, with their tall spars, and their ensigns fluttering in the sunlight. They lay in two tiers across the river, four in each tier, the first row consisting of small forty-tonners, the more stately craft behind. A brisk north-easterly wind was blowing, causing the bosom of the river to flash in ripples of light. Boats of every size and shape moved up and down and across the stream. The sudden firing of a gun caused some movement among the red-capped mariners of the four yachts in front.

"They are standing by the halyards," said Colonel Ross, to his women-folk. "Now watch for the next signal."

Another gun was fired; and all of a sudden there was a rattling of blocks and chains; and the four mainsails slowly rose; and the

flapping jibs were run up. The bows drifted round: which would get way on her first? But now there was a wild uproar of voices. The boom-end of one of the yachts had caught one of the stays of her companion; and both were brought up head to wind. Cutter No. III. took advantage of this mishap to sail through the lee of both her enemies, and got clear away, with the sunlight playing full on her bellying canvas. But there was no time to watch the further adventures of the forty-tonners. Here and closer at hand were the larger craft; and high up in the rigging were the mites of men, ready to drop into the air, clinging on to the halyards. The gun is fired; down they come, swinging in the air; and the moment they have reached the deck they are off and up the ratlines again, again to drop into the air until the throat is high hoisted, the peak swinging this way and that, and the gray folds of the mainsail lazily flapping in the wind. The steamer begins to roar. The yachts fall away from their moorings; and one by one the sails fill out to the fresh breeze. And now all is

silence and an easy gliding motion; for the eight competitors have all started away, and the steamer is smoothly following them.

"How beautiful they are—like splendid swans!" Miss White said: she had a glass in her hand, but did not use it, for as yet the stately fleet was near enough.

"A swan has a body," said Macleod. "Those things seem to me to be nothing but wings. It is all canvas, and no hull."

And indeed when the large topsails and big jibs came to be set, it certainly appeared as if there was nothing below to steady this vast extent of canvas.

"If they were up in our part of the world," said he, "I am afraid a puff of wind from the Gribun cliffs might send the whole fleet to the bottom."

"They know better than to try, at least with their present rig," Colonel Ross said. "Those yachts are admirably suited for the Thames; and Thames yachting is a very nice thing. It is very close to London. You can take a day's fresh air when you like, without going all the way to Cowes. You can get back to town in time to dine."

"I hope so," said Miss White, with emphasis.

"Oh, you need not be afraid," her host said, laughing. "We only go round the Nore to-day, and with this steady breeze we ought to be back early in the afternoon. My dear Miss White, we sha'n't allow you to disappoint the British public."

"So I may abandon myself to complete idleness without concern?"

"Most certainly."

And it was an enjoyable sort of idleness. The river was full of life and animation as they glided along; fitful shadows and bursts of sunshine crossed the foliage and pasture-lands of the flat shores; the yellow surface of the stream was broken with gleams of silver; and always, when this somewhat tame and peaceful and pretty landscape tended to become monotonous, they had on this side or that the spectacle of one of those tall and beautiful yachts rounding on a new tack or creeping steadily up on one of her opponents. They had a sweepstakes, of course; and Macleod drew the favourite. But then he proceeded to explain to Miss White that

the handicapping by means of time-allowances made the choice of a favourite a mere matter of guesswork; that the fouling at the start was of but little moment; and that on the whole she ought to exchange yachts with him.

"But if the chances are all equal, why should your yacht be better than mine?" said she.

The argument was unanswerable; but she took the favourite for all that, because he wished her to do so; and she tendered him in return the bit of folded paper with the name of a rival yacht on it. It had been in her purse for a minute or two. It was scented when she handed it to him.

"I should like to go to the Mediterranean in one of those beautiful yachts," she said, looking away across the troubled waters; "and lie and dream under the blue skies. I should want no other occupation: that would be real idleness. With a breath of wind now and then to temper the heat; and an awning over the deck; and a lot of books. Life would go by like a dream."

Her eyes were distant and pensive. To fold the bits of paper, she had taken off her gloves:

he regarded the small white hands, with the blue veins, and the pink almond-shaped nails. She was right. That was the proper sort of existence for one so fine, and pale, and perfect even to the finger-tips. *Rose-leaf—Rose-leaf—what faint wind will carry you away to the south?*

At this moment the band struck up a lively air. What was it?

> *"O this is no my ain lassie,*
> *Fair though the lassie be!"*

"You are in great favour to-day, Hugh," Mrs. Ross said to her husband. "You will have to ask the bandmaster to lunch with us."

But this sharp alterative of a well-known air had sent Macleod's thoughts flying away northward, to scenes far different from these flat shores, and to a sort of boating very different from this summer sailing. Janet, too: what was she thinking of—far away in Castle Dare? Of the wild morning on which she insisted on crossing to one of the Treshnish islands, because of the sick child of the shepherd there; and of the open herring-smack, and she sitting on the ballast-stones; and of the fierce gale of wind and

rain that hid the island from their sight; and of her landing, drenched to the skin, and with the salt water running from her hair and down her face?

"Now for lunch," said Colonel Ross; and they went below.

The bright little saloon was decorated with flowers; the coloured glass on the table looked pretty enough; here was a pleasant break in the monotony of the day. It was an occasion, too, for assiduous helpfulness, and gentle inquiries, and patient attention. They forgot about the various chances of the yachts. They could not at once have remembered the name of the favourite. And there was a good deal of laughter and pleasant chatting, while the band overhead—heard through the open skylight—still played—

> *"O this is no my ain lassie,*
> *Kind though the lassie be!"*

And behold! when they went up on deck again, they had got ahead of all the yachts, and were past the forts at the mouth of the Medway, and were out on an open space of

yellowish-green water that showed where the tide of the sea met the current of the river. And away down there in the south a long spur of land ran out at the horizon; and the sea immediately under was still and glassy, so that the neck of land seemed projected into the sky—a sort of gigantic razor-fish suspended in the silvery clouds. Then, to give the yachts time to overtake them, they steamed over to a mighty ironclad that lay at anchor there; and as they came near her vast black bulk they lowered their flag, and the band played "Rule Britannia!" The salute was returned; the officer on the high quarter-deck raised his cap; they steamed on.

In due course of time they reached the Nore light-ship; and there they lay and drifted about until the yachts should come up. Long distances now separated that summer fleet; but as they came along, lying well over before the brisk breeze, it was obvious that the spaces of time between the combatants would not be great. And is not this Miss White's vessel, the favourite in the betting, that comes sheering through the

water with white foam at her bows? Surely she is more than her time-allowance ahead? And on this tack will she get clear round the squat little light-ship; or is there not a danger of her carrying off a bowsprit? With what an ease and majesty she comes along! scarcely dipping to the slight summer waves; while they on board notice that she has put out her long spinnaker boom, ready to hoist a great ballooner as soon as she is round the light-ship and running home before the wind. The speed at which she cuts the water is now visible enough as she obscures for a second or so the hull of the light-ship. In another second she has sheered round; and then the great spinnaker bulges out with the breeze; and away she goes up the river again. Chronometers are in request. It is only a matter of fifty seconds that her nearest rival, now coming sweeping along, has to make up. But what is this that happens just as the enemy has got round the Nore? There is a cry of "Man overboard!" The spinnaker boom has caught the careless

skipper and pitched him clean into the plashing waters, where he floats about, not as yet certain, probably, what course his vessel will take. She at once brings her head up to wind, and puts about; but meanwhile a small boat from the light-ship has picked up the unhappy skipper, and is now pulling hard to strike the course of the yacht on her new tack. In another minute or two he is on board again; and away she goes for home.

"I think you have won the sweepstakes, Miss White," Macleod said. "Your enemy has lost eight minutes."

She was not thinking of sweepstakes. She seemed to have been greatly frightened by the accident.

"It would have been so dreadful to see a man drowned before your eyes—in the midst of a mere holiday excursion."

"Drowned?" he cried. "There? If a sailor lets himself get drowned in this water with all these boats about he deserves it."

"But there are many sailors who cannot swim at all."

"More shame for them," said he.

"Why, Sir Keith," said Mrs. Ross, laughing, "do you think that all people have been brought up to an amphibious life like yourself? I suppose in your country, what with the rain and the mist, you seldom know whether you are on sea or shore?"

"That is quite true," said he gravely. "And the children are all born with fins. And we can hear the mermaids singing all day long. And when we want to go anywhere we get on the back of a dolphin."

But he looked at Gertrude White. What would she say about that far land that she had shown such a deep interest in? There was no raillery at all in her low voice as she spoke.

"I can very well understand," she said, "how the people there fancied they heard the mermaids singing—amidst so much mystery—and with the awfulness of the sea around them."

"But we have had living singers," said Macleod, "and that amongst the Macleods

too. The most famous of all the song-writers of the Western Highlands was Mary Macleod that was born in Harris — Mairi nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, they called her — that is, Mary the daughter of Red Alister. Macleod of Dunvegan wished her not to make any more songs: but she could not cease the making of songs. And there was another Macleod—Fionaghal they called her —that is, the Fair Stranger. I do not know why they called her the Fair Stranger — perhaps she came to the Highlands from some distant place. And I think if you were going amongst the people there at this very day, they would call you the Fair Stranger."

He spoke quite naturally and thoughtlessly; his eyes met hers only for a second; he did not notice the soft touch of pink that suffused the delicately-tinted cheek.

The booming of a gun told them that the last yacht had rounded the light-ship; the band struck up a lively air; and presently the steamer was steaming off in the wake of the procession of yachts. There was now no

more fear that Miss White should be late. The breeze had kept up well, and had now shifted a point or two to the east; so that the yachts, with their great ballooners, were running pretty well before the wind. The lazy abandonment of the day became more complete than ever. Careless talk and laughter; an easy curiosity about the fortunes of the race; tea in the saloon, with the making up of two bouquets of white roses, sweet-peas, fuchsias, and ferns; the day passed lightly and swiftly enough. It was a summer day; full of pretty trifles. Macleod, surrendering to the fascination, began to wonder what life would be if it were all a show of June colours and a sound of dreamy music: for one thing he could not imagine this sensitive, beautiful, pale, fine creature otherwise than as surrounded by an atmosphere of delicate attentions and pretty speeches, and sweet low laughter.

They got into their special train again at Gravesend, and were whirled up to London. At Charing Cross he bade good-bye to Miss White, who was driven off by Mr. and Mrs.

Ross, along with their other guest. In the light of the clear June evening he walked rather absently up to his rooms.

There was a letter lying on the table. He seized it and opened it with gladness. It was from his cousin Janet—and the mere sight of it seemed to revive him like a gust of keen wind from the sea. What had she to say? About the grumblings of Donald, who seemed to have no more pride in his pipes now the master was gone? About the anxiety of his mother over the reports of the keepers? About the upsetting of a dog-cart on the road to Loch Buy? He had half resolved to go to the theatre again that evening—getting, if possible, into some corner where he might pursue his profound psychological investigations unseen—but now he thought he would not go. He would spend the evening in writing a long letter to his cousin, telling her and the mother about all the beautiful, fine, gay, summer life he had seen in London—so different from anything he had seen in Fort William, or Inverness, or even in

Edinburgh. After dinner he sate down to this agreeable task. What had he to write about except brilliant rooms, and beautiful flowers, and costumes such as would have made Janet's eyes wide: of all the delicate luxuries of life, and happy idleness, and the careless enjoyment of people whose only thought was about a new pleasure? He gave a minute description of all the places he had been to see—except the theatre. He mentioned the names of the people who had been kind to him; but he said nothing about Gertrude White.

Not that she was altogether absent from his thoughts. Sometimes his fancy fled away from the sheet of paper before him, and saw strange things. Was this Fionaghal, the Fair Stranger, —this maiden who had come over the seas to the dark shores of the isles—this king's daughter clad in white, with her yellow hair down to her waist, and bands of gold on her wrists? And what does she sing to the lashing waves but songs of high courage, and triumph, and welcome to her brave lover coming home with plunder through the battling seas? Her lips

are parted with her singing; but her glance is bold and keen: she has the spirit of a king's daughter, let her come from whence she may.

Or is Fionaghal, the Fair Stranger, this poorly-drest lass, who boils the potatoes over the rude peat-fire—and croons her songs of suffering and of the cruel drowning in the seas—so that from hut to hut they carry her songs, and the old wives' tears start afresh to think of their brave sons lost years and years ago?

Neither Fionaghal is she—this beautiful, pale woman, with her sweet, modern English speech, and her delicate, sensitive ways, and her hand that might be crushed like a rose-leaf. There is a shimmer of summer around her; flowers lie in her lap: tender observances encompass and shelter her. Not for her the biting winds of the northern seas; but rather the soft luxurious idleness of placid waters, and blue skies, and shadowy shores. . . . . *Rose-leaf—Rose-leaf—what faint wind will carry you away to the south?*

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE.

LATE one night a carefully-dressed elderly gentleman applied his latch-key to the door of a house in Bury-street, St. James's, and was about to enter without any great circumspection, when he was suddenly met by a white phantom, which threw him off his legs, and dashed outwards into the street. The language that the elderly gentleman used, as he picked himself up, need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the white phantom was the dog Oscar, who had been shut in a minute before by his master, and who now, after one or two preliminary dashes up and down the street, very soon perceived the tall figure of Macleod, and made joyfully after him. But Oscar knew that he had acted wrongly; and was ashamed

to show himself; so he quietly slunk along at his master's heels. The consequence of this was that the few loiterers about beheld the very unusual spectacle of a tall young gentleman walking down Bury-street and into King-street dressed in full Highland costume and followed by a white and lemon collie. No other person going to the Caledonian fancy-dress ball was so attended.

Macleod made his way through the carriages, crossed the pavement and entered the passage. Then he heard some scuffling behind; and he turned.

"Let alone my dog, you fellow!" said he, making a step forward; for the man had got hold of Oscar by the head, and was hauling him out.

"Is he your dog, sir?" said he.

Oscar himself answered by wrestling himself free, and taking refuge by his master's legs, though he still looked guilty.

"Yes, he is my dog; and a nice fix he has got me into," said Macleod, standing aside to let the Empress Maria Theresa pass by in her

resplendent costume. "I suppose I must walk home with him again. Oscar, Oscar! how dare you?"

"If you please, sir," said a juvenile voice behind him, "If Mr. —— will let me, I will take the dog. I know where to tie him up."

Macleod turned.

"*Cò an so?*" said he, looking down at the chubby-faced boy in the kilt, who had his pipes under his arm. "Don't you know the Gaelic?"

"I am only learning," said the young musician. "Will I take the dog, sir?"

"March along, then, *phiobaire bhig!*" Macleod said. "He will follow me, if he will not follow you."

Little Piper turned aside into a large hall which had been transformed into a sort of waiting-room; and here Macleod found himself in the presence of a considerable number of children, half of them girls, half of them boys, all dressed in tartan, and seated on the forms along the walls. The children, who were half asleep at this time of the night, woke up

with sudden interest at sight of the beautiful collie; and at the same moment Little Piper explained to the gentleman who was in charge of these young ones that the dog had to be tied up somewhere, and that a small adjoining room would answer that purpose. The proposal was most courteously entertained. Macleod, Mr. ——, and Little Piper walked along to this side room, and there Oscar was properly secured.

"And I will get him some water, sir, if he wants it," said the boy in the kilt.

"Very well," Macleod said. "And I will give you my thanks for it; for that is all that a Highlander, and especially a piper, expects for a kindness. And I hope you will learn the Gaelic soon, my boy. And do you know *Cumhadh na Cloinne?* No, it is too difficult for you; but I think if I had the chanter between my fingers myself, I could let you hear *Cumhadh na Cloinne.*"

"I am sure John Maclean can play it," said the small piper.

"Who is he?"

The gentleman in charge of the youngsters explained that John Maclean was the eldest of the juvenile pipers, five others of whom were in attendance.

"I think," said Macleod, "that I am coming down in a little time to make the acquaintance of your young pipers, if you will let me."

He passed up the broad staircase, and into the empty supper-room, from which a number of entrances showed him the strange scene being enacted in the larger hall. Who were these people who were moving to the sound of rapid music? A clown in a silken dress of many colours, with bells to his cap and wrists, stood at one of the doors; Macleod became his fellow-spectator of what was going forward. A beautiful Tyrolienne, in a dress of black silver and velvet, with her yellow hair hanging in two plaits down her back, passed into the room accompanied by Charles the First in a large wig and cloak; and the next moment they were whirling along in the waltz, coming into innumerable collisions with all the celebrated folk who ever lived in history. And who

were those gentlemen in the scarlet collars and cuffs, who but for these adornments would have been in ordinary evening dress? He made bold to ask the friendly clown, who was staring in a pensive manner at the rushing couples.

"They call it the Windsor uniform," said the clown. "*I* think it mean. I sha'n't come in a fancy dress again, if stitching on a red collar will do."

At this moment the waltz came to an end; and the people began to walk up and down the spacious apartment. Macleod entered the throng, to look about him. And soon he perceived, in one of the little stands at the side of the hall, the noble lady who had asked him to go to this assembly, and forthwith he made his way through the crowd to her. He was most graciously received.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Lady ——?" said he. "You know the children belonging to the charity—they are all below—and they are sitting doing nothing, and they are all very tired and half-asleep. It is a shame to keep them there'——

"But the Prince hasn't come yet; and they must be marched round: they show that we are not making fools of ourselves for nothing."

A sharper person than Macleod might have got in a pretty compliment here; for this lady was charmingly dressed as Flora Macdonald; but he merely said—

"Very well; perhaps it is necessary. But I think I can get them some amusement, if you will only keep the director of them, that is Mr. ——, out of the way. Now shall I send him to you? Will you talk to him?"

"What do you mean to do?"

"I want to give them a dance. Why should you have all the dancing up here?"

"Mind, I am not responsible. What shall I talk to him about?"

Macleod considered for a moment.

"Tell him that I will take the whole of the girls and boys to the Crystal Palace for a day, if it is permissible; and ask him what it will cost, and all about the arrangements."

"Seriously?"

"Yes. Why not? They can have a fine run

in the grounds; and six pipers to play for them. I will ask them now whether they will go."

He left and went down stairs. He had seen but few people in the hall above whom he knew. He was not fond of dancing, though he knew the elaborate variations of the reel. And here was a bit of practical amusement.

"Oh, Mr. ——," said he, with great seriousness, "I am desired by Lady —— to say that she would like to see you for a moment or two. She wishes to ask you some questions about your young people."

"The Prince may come at any moment," said Mr. ——, doubtfully.

"He won't be in such a hurry as all that, surely!"

So the worthy man went up stairs; and the moment he was gone Macleod shut the door.

"Now, you piper boys!" he called aloud, "get up, and play us a reel! We are going to have a dance. You are all asleep, I believe. Come, girls, stand up—you that know the reel, you will keep to this end. Boys, come out! You that can dance a reel come to this end; the others will

soon pick it up. Now, piper boys, have you got the steam up? What can you give us now? *Monymusk?* or the *Marquis of Huntley's Fling?* or *Miss Johnston?* Nay, stay a bit—don't you know *Mrs. Macleod of Raasay?*"

"Yes—yes—yes—yes—yes—yes!" came from the six pipers all standing in a row, with the drones over their shoulders and the chanters in their fingers.

"Very well, then—off you go! Now, boys and girls, are you all ready? Pipers, *Mrs. Macleod of Raasay!*"

For a second there was a confused roaring on the long drones; then the shrill pipes broke clear away into the wild reel; and presently the boys and girls, who were at first laughingly shy and embarrassed, began to make such imitations of the reel-figure, which they had seen often enough, as led to a vast amount of scrambling and jollity, if it was not particularly accurate. The most timid of the young ones soon picked up courage. Here and there one of the older boys gave a whoop that would have done justice to a wedding-dance in a Highland barn.

"Put your lungs into it, pipers!" Macleod cried. "Well played, boys! You are fit to play before a prince!"

The round cheeks of the boys were red with their blowing; they tapped their toes on the ground as proudly as if every one of them was a MacCruimin; the wild noise in this big empty hall grew more furious than ever—when suddenly there was an awful silence. The pipers dropped their pipes; the children, suddenly stopping in their merriment, cast one awestruck glance towards the door; and then slunk back to their seats. They had observed not only Mr. ——, but also the Prince himself. Macleod was left standing alone in the middle of the floor.

"Sir Keith Macleod?" said His Royal Highness, with a smile.

Macleod bowed low.

"Lady —— told me what you were about. I thought we could have had a peep unobserved; or we should not have broken in on the romp of the children."

"I think your Royal Highness could make amends for that," said Macleod.

There was an inquiring glance.

"If your Royal Highness would ask some one to see that each of the children has an orange, and a tart, and a shilling, it would be some compensation to them for being kept up so late."

"I think that might be done," said the Prince, as he turned to leave. "And I am glad to have made your acquaintance, although in"——

"In the character of a dancing-master," said Macleod, gravely.

After having once more visited Oscar, in the company of Piobaire Beag, Macleod went up again to the brilliantly-lit hall; and here he found that a further number of his friends had arrived. Among them was young Ogilvie, in the tartan of the 93rd Highlanders; and very smart indeed the boy-officer looked in his uniform. Mrs. Ross was here too; and she was busy in assisting to get up the Highland quadrille. When she asked Macleod if he would join in it, he answered by asking her to be his partner, as he would be ashamed to display his ignorance before an absolute stranger. Mrs. Ross most kindly undertook to pilot him through

the not elaborate intricacies of the dance; and they were fortunate in having the set made up entirely of their own friends.

Then the procession of the children took place; and the fastastically dressed crowd formed a lane to let the homely-clad lads and lasses pass along, with the six small pipers proudly playing a march at their head.

He stopped the last of the children, for a second.

"Have you got a tart, and an orange, and a shilling?"

"No, sir."

"I have got the word of a prince for it," he said to himself, as he went out of the room. "And they shall not go home with empty pockets."

As he was coming up the staircase again to the ball-room, he was preceded by two figures that were calculated to attract any one's notice by the picturesqueness of their costume. The one stranger was apparently an old man, who was dressed in a Florentine costume of the fourteenth century—a cloak of sombre red, with

a flat cap of black velvet, one long tail of which was thrown over the left shoulder and hung down behind. A silver collar hung from his neck across his breast: other ornament there was none. His companion, however, drew all eyes towards her as the two passed into the ball-room. She was dressed in imitation of Gainsborough's portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire; and her symmetrical figure and well-poised head admirably suited the long-trained costume of blue satin, with its *fichu* of white muslin, the bold, coquettish hat and feathers, and the powdered puffs and curls that descended to her shoulders. She had a gay air with her too. She bore her head proudly. The patches on her cheek seemed not half so black as the blackness of her eyes, so full of a dark mischievous light were they; and the redness of the lips—a trifle artificial, no doubt—as she smiled, seemed to add to the glittering whiteness of her teeth. The proud, laughing, gay coquette: no wonder all eyes were for a moment turned to her, in envy or in admiration.

Macleod, following these two, and finding that

his old companion, the pensive clown in cap and bells, was still at his post of observation at the door, remained there also for a minute or two; and noticed that among the first to recognise the two strangers was young Ogilvie, who, with laughing surprise in his face, came forward to shake hands with them. Then there was some further speech; the band began to play a gentle and melodious waltz; the middle of the room cleared somewhat; and presently her Grace of Devonshire was whirled away by the young Highland officer, her broad-brimmed hat rather overshadowing him, notwithstanding the pronounced colours of his plaid. Macleod could not help following this couple with his eyes, whithersoever they went. In any part of the rapidly moving crowd he could always make out that one figure; and once or twice as they passed him it seemed to him that the brilliant beauty, with her powdered hair, and her flashing bright eyes, and her merry lips, regarded him for an instant; and then he could have imagined that in a bygone century—

"Sir Keith Macleod, I think?"

The old gentleman with the grave and scholarly cap of black velvet and the long cloak of sober red, held out his hand. The folds of the velvet hanging down from the cap rather shadowed his face; but all the same Macleod instantly recognised him—fixing the recognition by means of the gold spectacles.

"Mr. White?" said he.

"I am more disguised than you are," the old gentleman said, with a smile. "It is a foolish notion of my daughter's, but she would have me come."

His daughter! Macleod turned in a bewildered way to that gay crowd under the brilliant lights.

"Was that Miss White?" said he.

"The Duchess of Devonshire. Didn't you recognise her? I am afraid she will be very tired to-morrow; but she would come."

He caught sight of her again. That woman—with the dark eyes full of fire—and the dashing air—and the audacious smile——? He could have believed this old man to be mad. Or was he only the father of a witch—of an illusive

ignis fatuus—of some mocking Ariel darting into a dozen shapes to make fools of the poor simple souls of earth?

"No," he stammered, "I—I did not recognise her. I thought the lady who came with you had intensely dark eyes."

"She is said to be very clever in making up," her father said, coolly and sententiously. "It is a part of her art that is not to be despised. It is quite as important as a gesture or a tone of voice in creating the illusion at which she aims. I do not know whether actresses, as a rule, are careless about it, or only clumsy; but they rarely succeed in making their appearance homogeneous. A trifle too much here; a trifle too little there; and the illusion is spoiled. Then you see a painted woman; not the character she is presenting. Did you observe my daughter's eyebrows?"

"No, sir, I did not," said Macleod, humbly.

"Here she comes. Look at them."

But how could he look at her eyebrows, or at any trick of making up, when the whole face with its new excitement of colour, its parted

lips and lambent eyes, was throwing its fascination upon him? She came forward laughing, and yet with a certain shyness. He would fain have turned away.

The Highlanders are superstitious. Did he fear being bewitched? Or what was it that threw a certain coldness over his manner? The fact of her having danced with young Ogilvie? Or the ugly reference made by her father to her eyebrows? He had greatly admired this painted stranger, when he thought she was a stranger; he seemed less to admire the artistic make-up of Miss Gertrude White.

The merry Duchess, playing her part admirably, charmed all eyes but his; and yet she was so kind as to devote herself to her father and him, refusing invitations to dance, and chatting to them—with those brilliant lips smiling—about the various features of the gay scene before them. Macleod avoided looking at her face.

"What a bonny boy your friend Mr. Ogilvie is," said she, glancing across the room.

He did not answer.

"But he does not look much of a soldier," she

continued. "I don't think I should be afraid of him, if I were a man."

He answered, somewhat distantly,

"It is not safe to judge that way—especially of any one of Highland blood. If there is fighting in his blood, he will fight when the proper time comes. And we have a good Gaelic saying—it has a great deal of meaning in it; it says—*You do not know what sword is in the scabbard until it is drawn.*"

"What did you say was the proverb?" she asked; and for a second her eyes met his—but she immediately withdrew them, startled by the cold austerity of his look.

"*You do not know what sword is in the scabbard until it is drawn,*" said he, carelessly. "There is a good deal of meaning in that saying."

CHAPTER VIII.

LAUREL COTTAGE.

A SMALL, quaint, old-fashioned house in South Bank, Regent's Park; two maidens in white in the open verandah; around them the abundant foliage of June, unruffled by any breeze; and down at the foot of the steep garden the still canal, its surface mirroring the soft translucent greens of the trees and bushes above, and the gaudier colours of a barge lying moored on the northern side. The elder of the two girls is seated in a rocking-chair; she appears to have been reading, for her right hand, hanging down, still holds a thin MS. book covered with coarse brown paper. The younger is lying at her feet, with her head thrown back in her sister's lap, and her face turned up to the clear June skies.

LAUREL COTTAGE.

There are some roses about this verandah; and the still air is sweet with them.

"And of all the parts you ever played in," she says, "which one did you like the best, Gerty?"

"This one," is the gentle answer.

"What one?"

"Being at home with you and papa, and having no bother at all, and nothing to think of."

"I don't believe it," says the other, with the brutal frankness of thirteen. "You couldn't live without the theatre, Gerty—and the newspapers talking about you—and people praising you—and bouquets"——

"Couldn't I?" says Miss White, with a smile, as she gently lays her hand on her sister's curls.

"No," continues the wise young lady. "And besides, this pretty, quiet life would not last. You would have to give up playing that part. Papa is getting very old now; and he often talks about what may happen to us. And you know, Gerty, that though it is very nice

for sisters to say they will never and never leave each other, it doesn't come off, does it? There is only one thing I see for you—and that is to get married."

"Indeed."

It is easy to fence with a child's prattle. She might have amused herself by encouraging this chatterbox to go through the list of their acquaintances, and pick out a goodly choice of suitors. She might have encouraged her to give expression to her profound views of the chances and troubles of life, and the safeguards that timid maidens may seek. But she suddenly said, in a highly matter-of-fact manner—

"What you say is quite true, Carry, and I've thought of it several times. It is a very bad thing for an actress to be left without a father, or husband, or brother as her ostensible guardian. People are always glad to hear stories — and to make them — about actresses. You would be no good at all, Carry"——

"Very well, then," the younger sister said

promptly, "you've got to get married. And to a rich man, too; who will buy you a theatre, and let you do what you like in it."

Miss Gertrude White—whatever she may have thought of this speech—was bound to rebuke the shockingly mercenary ring of it.

"For shame, Carry! Do you think people marry from such motives as that?"

"I don't know," said Carry; but she had, at least, guessed.

"I should like my husband to have money, certainly," Miss White said, frankly; and here she flung the MS. book from her, on to a neighbouring chair. "I should like to be able to refuse parts that did not suit me. I should like to be able to take just such engagements as I chose. I should like to go to Paris for a whole year—and study hard"——

"Your husband might not wish you to remain an actress," said Miss Carry.

"Then he would never be my husband," the elder sister said, with decision. "I have not worked hard for nothing. Just when I begin to think I can do something—when I

think I can get beyond those coquettish, drawing-room, simpering parts that people run after now—just when the very name of Mrs. Siddons, or Rachel, or any of the great actresses makes my heart jump—when I have ambition, and a fair chance, and all that—do you think I am to give the whole thing up, and sink quietly into the position of Mrs. Brown or Mrs. Smith, who is a very nice lady, no doubt, and very respectable, and lives a quiet and orderly life, with no greater excitement than scheming to get big people to go to her garden-parties?"

She certainly seemed very clear on that point.

"I don't see that men are so ready to give up their profession, when they marry, in order to devote themselves to domestic life, even when they have plenty of money. Why should all the sacrifice be on the side of the woman? But I know if I have to choose between my art and a husband, I shall continue to do without a husband."

Miss Carry had risen, and put one arm

round her sister's neck, while with the other she stroked the soft brown hair over the smooth forehead.

"And it shall not be taken away from its pretty theatre, it sha'n't!" said she, pettingly; "and it shall not be asked to go away with any great ugly Bluebeard, and be shut up in a lonely house"——

"Go away, Carry," said she, releasing herself. "I wonder why you began talking such nonsense. What do you know about all those things?"

"Oh! very well," said the child, turning away with a pout; and she pulled a rose, and began to take its petals off, one by one, with her lips. "Perhaps I don't know. Perhaps I haven't studied your manœuvres on the stage, Miss Gertrude White. Perhaps I never saw the newspapers declaring that it was all so very natural and life-like"—— She flung two or three rose-petals at her sister. ——"I believe you're the biggest flirt that ever lived, Gerty. You could make any man you liked marry you in ten minutes."

"I wish I could manage to have certain school-girls whipped and sent to bed."

At this moment there appeared at the open French window an elderly woman of Flemish features and extraordinary breadth of bust.

"Shall I put dressing in the salad, Miss?" she said, with scarcely any trace of foreign accent.

"Not yet, Marie," said Miss White. "I will make the dressing first. Bring me a large plate, and the cruet-stand, and a spoon and fork, and some salt."

Now when these things had been brought, and when Miss White had set about preparing this salad-dressing in a highly-scientific manner, a strange thing occurred. Her sister seemed to have been attacked by a sudden fit of madness. She had caught up a light shawl, which she extended from hand to hand, as if she were dancing with some one, and then she proceeded to execute a slow waltz in this circumscribed space, humming the improvised music in a mystical and rhythmical manner. And what were these dark utterances that the

inspired one gave forth, as she glanced from time to time at her sister and the plate?

> "'*O, a Highland lad my love was born,*
> *And the Lowland laws he held in scorn.*'"

"Carry, don't make a fool of yourself!" said the other, flushing angrily.

Carry flung her imaginary partner aside.

"There is no use making any pretence," said she, sharply. "You know quite well why you are making that salad-dressing."

"Did you never see me make salad-dressing before?" said the other, quite as sharply.

"You know it is simply because Sir Keith Macleod is coming to lunch. I forgot all about it. Oh, and that's why you had the clean curtains put up yesterday!"

What else had this precocious brain ferreted out?

"Yes, and that's why you bought papa a new neck-tie," continued the tormentor; and then she added, triumphantly, "*But he hasn't put it on this morning—ha, Gerty?*"

A calm and dignified silence is the best

answer to the fiendishness of thirteen. Miss White went on with the making of the salad-dressing. She was considered very clever at it. Her father had taught her; but he never had the patience to carry out his own precepts. Besides, brute force is not wanted for the work; what you want is the self-denying assiduity and the dexterous light-handedness of a woman.

A smart young maidservant, very trimly dressed, made her appearance.

"Sir Keith Macleod, miss," said she.

"Oh, Gerty, you're caught!" muttered the fiend.

But Miss White was equal to the occasion. The small white fingers plied the fork without a tremor.

"Ask him to step this way, please," she said.

And then the subtle imagination of this demon of thirteen jumped to another conclusion.

"Oh, Gerty, you want to show him that you are a good housekeeper—that you can make salad"——

But the imp was silenced by the appearance of Macleod himself. He looked tall as he came through the small drawing-room. When he came out on to the balcony, the languid air of the place seemed to acquire a fresh and brisk vitality: he had a bright smile and a resonant voice.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing you a little present, Miss White—no, it is a large present—that reached me this morning," said he. "I want you to see one of our Highland salmon. He is a splendid fellow—twenty-six pounds, four ounces, my landlady says. My cousin Janet sent him to me."

"Oh, but, Sir Keith, we cannot rob you," Miss White said, as she still demurely plied her fork. "If there is any special virtue in a Highland salmon, it will be better appreciated by yourself than by those who don't know."

"The fact is," said he, "people are so kind to me that I scarcely ever am allowed to dine at my lodgings; and you know the salmon should be cooked at once."

Miss Carry had been making a face behind his back, to annoy her sister. She now came forward and said, with a charming innocence in her eyes—

"I don't think you can have it cooked for luncheon, Gerty; for that would look too like bringing your tea in your pocket and getting hot water for twopence. Wouldn't it?"

Macleod turned and regarded this new comer with an unmistakable "Who is this?"—"*Cò an so?*"—in his air.

"Oh, that is my sister Carry, Sir Keith," said Miss White. "I forgot you had not seen her."

"How do you do?" said he, in a kindly way; and for a second he put his hand on the light curls as her father might have done. "I suppose you like having holidays?"

From that moment she became his deadly enemy. To be patted on the head, as if she were a child, an infant—and that in the presence of the sister whom she had just been lecturing!

"Yes, thank you," said she, with a splendid dignity, as she proudly walked off. She went

into the small lobby leading to the door. She called to the little maidservant. She looked at a certain long bag made of matting which lay there, some bits of grass sticking out of one end. "Jane, take this thing down stairs at once! The whole house smells of it."

Meanwhile Miss White had carried her salad-dressing in to Marie; and had gone out again to the verandah, where Macleod was seated. He was charmed with the dreamy stillness and silence of the place—with the hanging foliage all around, and the colours in the steep gardens, and the still waters below.

"I don't know how it is," said he, "but you seem to have much more open houses here than we have. Our houses in the north look cold, and hard, and bare. We should laugh if we saw a place like this near us—it seems to me a sort of a toy-place out of a picture—from Switzerland or some such country. Here you are in the open air—with your own little world around you; and nobody to see you; you might live all your life here, and know nothing about the storms crossing the

Atlantic, and the wars in Europe, if only you gave up the newspapers."

"Yes, it is very pretty, and quiet," said she, and the small fingers pulled to pieces one of the rose-leaves that Carry had thrown at her. "But you know one is never satisfied anywhere. If I were to tell you the longing I have to see the very places you describe as being so desolate —— But perhaps papa will take me there some day."

"I hope so," said he; "but I would not call them desolate. They are terrible at times; and they are lonely; and they make you think. But they are beautiful, too—with a sort of splendid beauty and grandeur that goes very near making you miserable. . . . I cannot describe it. You will see for yourself."

Here a bell rang; and at the same moment Mr. White made his appearance.

"How do you do, Sir Keith? Luncheon is ready, my dear—luncheon is ready—luncheon is ready."

He kept muttering to himself as he led the way. They entered a small dining-room; and

here, if Macleod had ever heard of actresses having little time to give to domestic affairs, he must have been struck by the exceeding neatness and brightness of everything on the table and around it. The snow-white cover; the brilliant glass and spoons; the carefully arranged, if tiny, bouquets; and the precision with which the smart little maidservant—the only attendant—waited: all these things showed a household well managed. Nay, this iced claret-cup—was it not of her own composition? —and a pleasanter beverage he had never drunk.

But she seemed to pay little attention to these matters; for she kept glancing at her father, who, as he addressed Macleod from time to time, was obviously nervous and harassed about something. At last she said—

"Papa, what is the matter with you? Has anything gone wrong this morning?"

"Oh, my dear child," said he, "don't speak of it. It is my memory—I fear my memory is going. But we will not trouble our guest about it. I think you were saying, Sir Keith,

that you had seen the latest additions to the National Gallery"—

"But what is it, papa?" his daughter insisted.

"My dear, my dear, I know I have the lines somewhere; and Lord —— says that the very first jug fired at the new pottery he is helping shall have these lines on it, and be kept for himself. I know I have both the Spanish original and the English translation somewhere; and all the morning I have been hunting and hunting—for only one line. I think I know the other three—

'OLD WINE TO DRINK.
OLD WRONGS LET SINK.
* * *
OLD FRIENDS IN NEED.'

It is the third line that has escaped me—dear, dear me! I fear my brain is going."

"But I will hunt for it, papa," said she; "I will get the lines for you. Don't you bother."

"No, no, no, child," said he, with somewhat of a pompous air. "You have this new character to study. You must not allow any

trouble to disturb the serenity of your mind while you are so engaged. You must give your heart and soul to it, Gerty; you must forget yourself; you must abandon yourself to it—and let it grow up in your mind until the conception is so perfect that there are no traces of the manner of its production left."

He certainly was addressing his daughter; but somehow the formal phrases suggested that he was speaking for the benefit of the stranger. The prim old gentleman continued:

"That is the only way. Art demands absolute self-forgetfulness. You must give yourself to it in complete surrender. People may not know the difference; but the true artist seeks only to be true to himself. You produce the perfect flower; they are not to know of the anxious care—of the agony of tears, perhaps—you have spent on it. But then your whole mind must be given to it; there must be no distracting cares: I will look for the missing line myself."

"I am quite sure, papa," said Miss Carry, spitefully, "that she was far more anxious

about these cutlets than about her new part this morning. She was half-a-dozen times down to the kitchen. I didn't see her reading the book much."

"The *res angustæ domi*," said the father sententiously, "sometimes interfere, where people are not too well off. But that is necessary. What is not necessary is that Gerty should take my troubles over to herself, and disturb her formation of this new character, which ought to be growing up in her mind almost insensibly, until she herself will scarcely be aware how real it is. When she steps on to the stage, she ought to be no more Gertrude White than you or I. The artist loses himself. He transfers his soul to his creation. His heart beats in another breast; he sees with other eyes. You will excuse me, Sir Keith; but I keep insisting on this point to my daughter. If she ever becomes a great artist, that will be the secret of her success. And she ought never to cease from cultivating the habit. She ought to be ready at any moment to project herself, as it were, into any character. She ought to

practise so as to make of her own emotions an instrument that she can use at will. It is a great demand that art makes on the life of an artist. In fact, he ceases to live for himself. He becomes merely a medium. His most secret experiences are the property of the world at large, once they have been transfused and moulded by his personal skill."

And so he continued talking, apparently for the instruction of his daughter, but also giving his guest clearly to understand that Miss Gertude White was not as other women, but rather as one set apart for the high and inexorable sacrifice demanded by art. At the end of his lecture, he abruptly asked Macleod if he had followed him. Yes, he had followed him; but in rather a bewildered way. Or had he some confused sense of self-reproach, in that he had distracted the contemplation of this pale and beautiful artist, and sent her down stairs to look after cutlets?

"It seems a little hard, sir," said Macleod to the old man, "that an artist is not to have any life of his or her own at all—that he or

she should become merely a—a—a sort of Ten-minutes emotionalist."

It was not a bad phrase for a rude Highlander to have invented on the spur of the moment. But the fact was that some little personal feeling stung him into the speech. He was prepared to resent this tyranny of art. And if he, now, were to see some beautiful, pale slave bound in these iron chains—and being exhibited for the amusement of an idle world—what would the fierce blood of the Macleods say to that debasement? He began to dislike this old man, with his cruel theories, and his oracular speech. But he forbore to have further, or any, argument with him; for he remembered what the Highlanders call "the advice of the bell of Scoon—*the thing that concerns you not, meddle not with.*"

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCESS RIGHINN.

THE people who lived in this land of summer and sunshine and flowers—had they no cares at all? He went out into the garden with these two girls; and they were like two young fawns in their careless play. Miss Carry, indeed, seemed bent on tantalising him by the manner in which she petted, and teased, and caressed her sister—scolding her, quarrelling with her and kissing her all at once. The grave, gentle, forbearing manner in which the elder sister bore all this was beautiful to see. And then her sudden concern and pity when the wild Miss Carry had succeeded in scratching her finger with the thorn of a rose-bush! It was the tiniest of scratches; and all the blood that appeared was about the size of a pin-head. But

Miss White must needs tear up her dainty little pocket-handkerchief, and bind that grievous wound, and condole with the poor victim as though she were suffering untold agonies. It was a pretty sort of idleness. It seemed to harmonize with this still beautiful summer day, and the soft green foliage around, and the quiet air that was sweet with the scent of the flowers of the lime-trees. They say that the Gaelic word for the lower regions, *ifrin*, is derived from *i-bhuirn*, the island of incessant rain. To a Highlander, therefore, must not this land of perpetual summer and sunshine have seemed to be heaven itself?

And even the malicious Carry relented for a moment.

"You said you were going to the Zoological Gardens," she said.

"Yes," he answered, "I am. I have seen everything I want to see in London, but that."

"Because Gerty and I might walk across the Park with you, and show you the way."

"I very much wish you would," said he, "if you have nothing better to do."

"I will see if papa does not want me," said Miss White calmly. She might just as well be walking in Regent's Park as in this small garden.

Presently the three of them set out.

"I am glad of any excuse," she said, with a smile, "for throwing aside that new part. It seems to me insufferably stupid. It is very hard that you should be expected to make a character look natural when the words you have to speak are such as no human being would use in any circumstances whatever."

Oddly enough, he never heard her make even the slightest reference to her profession without experiencing a sharp twinge of annoyance. He did not stay to ask himself why this should be so. Ordinarily, he simply made haste to change the subject.

"Then why should you take the part at all?" said he bluntly.

"Once you have given yourself up to a particular calling, you must accept its little annoyances," she said frankly. "I cannot have everything my own way. I have been very

fortunate in other respects. I have had very little of the drudgery of the provinces, though you know that is the best school possible for an actress. And I am sure the money and the care papa has spent on my training—you see, he has no son to send to college. I think he is far more anxious about my succeeding than I am myself."

"But you have succeeded," said Macleod. It was, indeed, the least he could say; with all his dislike of the subject.

"Oh, I do not call that success," said she simply. "That is merely pleasing people by showing them little scenes from their own drawing-rooms transferred to the stage. They like it because it is pretty, and familiar. And people pretend to be very cynical at present—they like things with 'no nonsense about them.' Still, if you happen to be ambitious—or perhaps it is mere vanity?—if you would like to try what is in you"——

"Gerty wants to be a Mrs. Siddons; that's it," said Miss Carry, promptly.

Talking to an actress about her profession;

and not having a word of compliment to say! Instead, he praised the noble elms and chestnuts of the park—the broad, white lake, the flowers, the avenues. He was greatly interested by the whizzing by overhead of a brace of duck.

"I suppose you are very fond of animals?" Miss White said.

"I am indeed," said he, suddenly brightening up. "And up at our place I give them all a chance. I don't allow a single weasel or hawk or osprey to be killed—though I have a great deal of trouble about it. But what is the result? I don't know whether there is such a thing as the balance of nature; or whether it is merely that the hawks and weasels and other vermin kill off the sickly birds; but I do know that we have less disease among our birds than I hear of anywhere else. I have sometimes shot a weasel, it is true, when I have run across him as he was hunting a rabbit—you cannot help doing that if you hear the rabbit squealing with fright long before the weasel is at him—but it is against my rule. I give them all a fair field and no favour. I even let the hoodie

crow alone, and he is a desperate villain. But there are two animals I put out of the list—I thought there was only one till this week, now there are two; and one of them I hate, the other I fear."

"Fear?" she said: the slight flash of surprise in her eyes was eloquent enough. But he did not notice it.

"Yes," said he, rather gloomily. "I suppose it is superstition—or you may have it in your blood—but the horror I have of the eyes of a snake—I cannot tell you of it. Perhaps I was frightened when I was a child—I cannot remember; or perhaps it was the stories of the old women. The serpent is very mysterious to the people in the Highlands—they have stories of water-snakes in the lochs—and if you get a nest of seven adders with one white one you boil the white one, and the man who drinks the broth knows all things in heaven and earth. In the Lewis they call the serpent *righinn*, that is '*a princess*'; and they say that the serpent is a princess bewitched. But that is from fear—it is a compliment"——

"But surely there are no serpents to be afraid of in the Highlands?" said Miss White. She was looking rather curiously at him.

"No," said he, in the same gloomy way. "The adders run away from you, if you are walking through the heather. If you tread on one, and he bites your boot, what then? He cannot hurt you. But suppose you are out after the deer, and you are crawling along the heather with your face to the ground, and all at once you see the two small eyes of an adder looking at you and close to you——"

He shuddered slightly—perhaps it was only an expression of disgust.

"I have heard," he continued, "that in parts of Islay they used to be so bad that the farmers would set fire to the heather in a circle, and as the heather burned in and in, you could see the snakes and adders twisting and curling in a great ball. We have not many with us. But one day John Begg, that is the schoolmaster, went behind a rock to get a light for his pipe; and he put his head close to the rock to be out of the wind; and then he thought he stirred

something with his cap; and the next moment the adder fell on to his shoulder, and bit him in the neck. He was half mad with the fright; but I think the adder must have bitten the cap first and expended its poison; for the schoolmaster was only ill for about two days, and then there was no more of it. But just think of it—an adder getting to your neck"——

"I would rather not think of it," she said, quickly. "What is the other animal — that you hate?"

"Oh!" he said, lightly, "that is a very different affair—that is a parrot that speaks. I was never shut up in a house with one till this week. My landlady's son brought her home one from the West Indies, and she put the cage on a window recess in my landing. At first it was a little amusing; but the constant yelp—it was too much for me. '*Pritty poal! pritty poal!*' I did not mind so much; but when the ugly brute, with its beady eyes and its black snout used to yelp '*Come and kiz me! come and kiz me!*' I grew to hate it. And in the morning too, how was one to sleep? I

used to open my door, and fling a boot at it; but that only served for a time. It began again."

"But you speak of it as having been there. What became of it?"

He glanced at her rather nervously—like a schoolboy; and laughed.

"Shall I tell you?" he said, rather shamefacedly. "The murder will be out, sooner or later. It was this morning. I could stand it no longer. I had thrown both my boots at it; it was no use. I got up a third time, and went out. The window, that looks into a back-yard, was open. Then I opened the parrot's cage. But the fool of an animal did not know what I meant—or it was afraid—and so I caught him by the back of the neck and flung him out. I don't know anything more about him."

"Could he fly?" said the big-eyed Carry, who had been quite interested in this tragic tale.

"I don't know," Macleod said, modestly. "There was no use asking him. All he could say was, '*Come and kiz me!*' and I got tired of that."

"Then you have murdered him!" said the elder sister in an awe-stricken voice; and she pretended to withdraw a bit from him. "I don't believe in the Macleods having become civilised, peaceable people. I believe they would have no hesitation in murdering any one that was in their way."

"Oh, Miss White!" said he in protest, "you must forget what I told you about the Macleods; and you must really believe they were no worse than the others of the same time. Now I was thinking of another story the other day, which I must tell you"——

"Oh, pray don't," she said, "if it is one of those terrible legends!"——

"But I must tell you," said he, "because it is about the Macdonalds; and I want to show you that we had not all the badness of those times. It was Donald Gorm Môr; and his nephew, Hugh Macdonald, who was the heir to the chieftainship, got a number of men to join him in a conspiracy to have his uncle murdered. The chief found it out, and forgave him. That was not like a Macleod," he admitted,

"for I never heard of a Macleod of those days forgiving anybody. But again Hugh Macdonald engaged in a conspiracy; and then Donald Gorm Môr thought he would put an end to the nonsense. What did he do? He thrust his nephew into a deep and foul dungeon —so the story says—and left him without food or water for a whole day. Then there was salt beef lowered into the dungeon; and Macdonald devoured the salt beef; for he was starving with hunger. Then they left him alone. But you can imagine the thirst of a man who has been eating salt beef, and who has had no water for a day or two. He was mad with thirst. Then they lowered a cup into the dungeon—you may imagine the eagerness with which the poor fellow saw it coming down to him—and how he caught it with both his hands. *But it was empty!* And so, having made a fool of him in that way, they left him to die of thirst. That was the Macdonalds, Miss White; not the Macleods."

"Then I am glad of Culloden," said she, with decision, "for destroying such a race of fiends."

"Oh, you must not say that," he protested, laughing. "We should have become quiet and respectable folks without Culloden. Even without Culloden, we should have had penny newspapers all the same; and tourist-boats from Oban to Iona. Indeed you won't find quieter folks anywhere than the Macdonalds and Macleods are now."

"I don't know how far you are to be trusted," said she, pretending to look at him with some doubt.

By this time they had reached the gate of the Gardens.

"Do let us go in, Gerty," said Miss Carry. "You know you always get hints for your dresses from the birds—you would never have thought of that flamingo pink and white if you had not been walking through here"——

"I will go in for a while if you like, Carry," said she; and certainly Macleod was nothing loth.

There were but few people in the Gardens on this afternoon; for all the world was up at the *Eton* and Harrow cricket-match at Lord's; and

there was little visible of 'Arry and his pipe. Macleod began to show more than a schoolboy's delight over the wonders of this strange place. That he was exceedingly fond of animals—always barring the two he had mentioned—was soon abundantly shown. He talked to them as though the mute inquiring eyes could understand him thoroughly. When he came to animals with which he was familiar in the north, he seemed to be renewing acquaintance with old friends; like himself, they were strangers in a strange land.

"Ah," said he to the splendid stag who was walking about the paddock with his velvety horns held proudly in the air, "what part of the Highlands have you come from? And wouldn't you like now a canter down the dry bed of a stream, on the side of Ben-an-Sloich?"

The hind, with slow and gentle step, and with her nut-brown hide shining in the sun, came up to the bars, and regarded him with those large, clear grey-green eyes—so different from the soft dark eyes of the roe—that had long

eyelashes on the upper lid. He rubbed her nose.

"And wouldn't you rather be up on the heather, munching the young grass, and drinking out of the burn?"

They went along to the great cage of the sea-eagles. The birds seemed to pay no heed to what was passing immediately around them. Ever and anon they jerked their head into an attitude of attention; and the golden-brown eye, with its contracted pupil and stern upper lid, seemed to be throwing a keen glance over immeasurable leagues of sea.

"Poor old chap," he said to the one perched high on an old stump, "wouldn't you like to have one sniff of a sea-breeze, and a look round for a heron or two? What do they give you here?—dead fish, I suppose?"

The eagle raised its great wings, and slowly flapped them once or twice, while it uttered a succession of shrill *yawps*.

"Oh, yes," he said, "you could make yourself heard above the sound of the waves. And I think if any of the boys were after your eggs,

or your young ones, you could make short work of them with those big wings. Or would you like to have a battle-royal with a seal, and try whether you could pilot the seal into the shore, or whether the seal would drag you and your fixed claws down to the bottom and drown you?"

There was a solitary kittiwake in a cage devoted to sea-birds, nearly all of which were foreigners.

"You poor little kittiwake," said he, "this is a sad place for you to be in. I think you would rather be out at Ru-Treshanish, even if it was blowing hard, and there was rain about. There was a dead whale came ashore there about a month ago; that would have been something like a feast for you."

"Why," said he, to his human companion, "if I had only known before! Whenever there was an hour or two with nothing to do, here was plenty of occupation. But I must not keep you too long, Miss White—I could remain here days and weeks."

"You will not go without looking in at the serpents?" said she, with a slight smile.

He hesitated for a second.

"No," said he, "I think I will not go in to see them."

"But you must," said she, cruelly. "You will see they are not such terrible creatures when they are shut up in glass boxes."

He suffered himself to be led along to the reptile house; but he was silent. He entered, the last of the three. He stood in the middle of the room, and looked around him in rather a strange way.

"Now come and look at this splendid fellow," said Miss White, who, with her sister, was leaning over the rail. "Look at his splendid bars of colour—do you see the beautiful blue sheen on its scales?"

It was a huge anaconda, its body, as thick as a man's leg, lying coiled up in a circle, its flat ugly head reposing in the middle. He came a bit nearer. "Hideous!" was all he said. And then his eyes were fixed on the eyes of the animal—the lidless eyes, with their perpetual, glassy stare. He had thought at first they were closed; but now he saw that that

opaque yellow substance was covered by a glassy coating, while in the centre there was a small slit as if cut by a penknife. The great coils slowly expanded and fell again, as the animal breathed; otherwise the fixed stare of those yellow eyes might have been taken for the stare of death.

"I don't think the anaconda is poisonous at all," said she, lightly.

"But if you were to meet that beast in a jungle," said he, "what difference would that make?"

He spoke reproachfully, as if she were luring him into some secret place, to have him slain with poisonous fangs. He passed on from that case to the others, unwillingly. The room was still. Most of the snakes would have seemed dead, but for the malign stare of the beaded eyes. He seemed anxious to get out; the atmosphere of the place was hot and oppressive.

But just at the door there was a case, some quick motion in which caught his eye; and despite himself he stopped to look. The inside of this glass box was alive with snakes—raising

their heads in the air—slimily crawling over each other—the small, black-forked tongues shooting in and out, the black points of eyes glassily staring. And the object that had moved quickly was a wretched little yellow frog, that was now motionless in a dish of water—its eyes apparently starting out of its head with horror. A snake made its appearance over the edge of the dish. The shooting black tongue approached the head of the frog; and then the long, sinuous body glided along the edge of the dish again—the frog meanwhile being too paralyzed with fear to move. A second afterwards the frog, apparently recovering, sprang clean out of the basin; but it was only to alight on the backs of two or three of the reptiles lying coiled up together. It made another spring, and got into a corner, among some grass. But along that side of the case another of those small, flat, yellow-marked heads was slowly creeping along, propelled by the squirming body; and again the frog made a sudden spring, this time leaping once more into the shallow water, where it stood and panted, with its eyes dilated. And now a

snake that had crawled up the side of the case put out its long neck as if to see whither it should proceed. There was nothing to lay hold of. The head swayed and twisted—the forked tongue shooting out—and at last the snake fell away from its hold, and splashed right into the basin of water, on the top of the frog. There was a wild shooting this way and that—but Macleod did not see the end of it. He had uttered some slight exclamation—and got into the open air, as one being suffocated—and there were drops of perspiration on his forehead, and a trembling of horror and disgust had seized him. His two companions followed him out.

"I feel rather faint," said he, in a low voice—and he did not turn to look at them as he spoke—"the air is close in that room."

They moved away. He looked around—at the beautiful green of the trees, and the blue sky, and the sunlight on the path—God's world was getting to be more wholesome again, and the choking sensation of disgust was going from his throat. He seemed, however, rather anxious to get away from this place. There was a gate

close by; he proposed they should go out by that. As he walked back with them to South Bank, they chatted about many of the animals—the two girls in especial being much interested in certain pheasants, whose colours of plumage, they thought, would look very pretty in a dress—but he never referred, either then or at any future time, to his visit to the reptile house. Nor did it occur to Miss White, in this idle conversation, to ask him whether his Highland blood had inherited any other qualities besides that instinctive and deadly horror of serpents.

CHAPTER X.

LAST NIGHTS.

"GOOD-NIGHT, Macleod! — good-night! — good-night!" The various voices came from the top of a drag. They were addressed to one of two young men who stood on the steps of the Star and Garter at Richmond—black figures in the blaze of light. And now the people on the drag had finally ensconced themselves; and the ladies had drawn their ample cloaks more completely round their gay costumes; and the two grooms were ready to set free the heads of the leaders. "Good-night, Macleod!" Lord Beauregard called again; and then, with a little preliminary prancing of the leaders, away swung the big vehicle through the clear darkness of the sweet-scented summer night.

"It was awfully good-natured of Beauregard

to bring six of your people down and take them back again," observed Lieutenant Ogilvie to his companion. "He wouldn't do it for most folks. He wouldn't do it for me. But then you have the grand air, Macleod. You seem to be conferring a favour when you get one."

"The people have been very kind to me," said Macleod, simply. "I do not know why. I wish I could take them all up to Castle Dare, and entertain them as a prince could entertain people——"

"I want to talk to you about that, Macleod," said his companion. "Shall we go up stairs again? I have left my hat and coat there."

They went up stairs, and entered a long chamber which had been formed by the throwing of two rooms into one. The one apartment had been used as a sort of withdrawing-room; in the other stood the long banquet-table, still covered with bright-coloured flowers, and dishes of fruit, and decanters and glasses. Ogilvie sat down, lit a cigar, and poured himself out some claret.

"Macleod," said he, "I am going to talk to

you like a father. I hear you have been going on in a mad way. Surely you know that a bachelor coming up to London for a season—and being asked about by people who are precious glad to get unmarried men to their houses—is not expected to give these swell dinner parties? And then, it seems, you have been bringing down all your people in drags. What do those flowers cost you? I dare say this is Lafitte, now?"

"And if it is, why not drink it, and say no more about it? I think they enjoyed themselves pretty well this evening—don't you, Ogilvie?"

"Yes, yes—but then, my dear fellow, the cost! You will say it is none of my business; but what would your decent, respectable mother say to all this extravagance?"

"Ah," said Macleod, "that is just the thing—I should have more pleasure in my little dinner parties if only the mother and Janet were here to see. I think the table would look a good deal better if my mother was at the head of it. And the cost?—oh, I am only following out her

instructions. She would not have people think that I was insensible to the kindness that has been shown me; and then we cannot ask all those good friends up to Castle Dare—it is an out-of-the-way place—and there are no flowers on the dining-table there——"

He laughed as he looked at the beautiful things before him: they would look strange in the gaunt hall of Castle Dare.

"Why," said he, "I will tell you a secret, Ogilvie. You know my cousin Janet—she is the kindest-hearted of all the women I know—and when I was coming away she gave me £2,000 just in case I should need it——"

"£2,000!" exclaimed Ogilvie. "Did she think you were going to buy Westminster Abbey during the course of your holidays?" And then he looked at the table before him; and a new idea seemed to strike him. "You don't mean to say, Macleod, that it is your cousin's money——"

Macleod's face flushed angrily. Had any other man made the suggestion, he would have received a tolerably sharp answer. But he only said to his old friend Ogilvie—

"No, no, Ogilvie; we are not very rich folks, but we have not come to that yet. 'I'd sell my kilt, I'd sell my shoon,' as the song says, before I touched a farthing of Janet's money. But I had to take it from her, so as not to offend her. It is wonderful, the anxiety and affection of women who live away out of the world like that. There was my mother, quite sure that something awful was going to happen to me, merely because I was going away for two or three months. And Janet—I suppose she knew that our family never was very good at saving money—she would have me take this little fortune of hers, just as if the old days were come back, and the son of the house was supposed to go to Paris to gamble away every penny——"

"By the way, Macleod," said Ogilvie, "you have never gone to Paris, as you intended."

"No," said he, trying to balance three nectarines one on the top of the other, "I have not gone to Paris. I have made enough friends in London. I have had plenty to occupy the time. And now, Ogilvie," he added brightly, "I am going in for my last frolic, before everybody has

left London; and you must come to it, even if you have to go down by your cold-meat train again. You know Miss Rawlinson; you have seen her at Mrs. Ross's, no doubt. Very well, I met her first when we went down to the Thames yacht race, and afterwards we became great friends; and the dear little old lady already looks on me as if I were her son. And do you know what her proposal is?—that she is to give me up her house and garden for a garden-party, and I am to ask my friends; and it is to be a dance as well, for we shall ask the people to have supper at eight o'clock or so; and then we shall have a marquee—and the garden all lighted up—do you see? It is one of the largest gardens on Campden Hill; and the coloured lamps hung on the trees will make it look very fine; and we shall have a band to play music for the dancers——"

"It will cost you £200 or £300, at least," said Ogilvie sharply.

"What then? You give your friends a pleasant evening, and you show them that you are not ungrateful," said Macleod.

Ogilvie began to ponder over this matter.

The stories he had heard of Macleod's extravagant entertainments were true, then. Suddenly he looked up and said—

"Is Miss White to be one of your guests?"

"I hope so," said he. "The theatre will be closed at the end of this week."

"I suppose you have been a good many times to the theatre?"

"To the Piccadilly Theatre?"

"Yes."

"I have been only once to the Piccadilly Theatre—when you and I went together," said Macleod, coldly; and they spoke no more of that matter.

By and by they thought they might as well smoke outside; and so they went down and out upon the high and walled terrace overlooking the broad valley of the Thames. And now the moon had arisen in the south, and the winding river showed a pale grey among the black woods, and there was a silvery light on the stone parapet on which they leaned their arms. The night was mild, and soft, and clear; there was an intense silence around; but they heard the faint

sound of oars far away—some boating party getting home through the dark shadows of the river-side trees.

"It is a beautiful life you have here in the south," Macleod said, after a time, "though I can imagine that the women enjoy it more than the men. It is natural for women to enjoy pretty colours, and flowers, and bright lights and music: and I suppose it is the mild air that lets their eyes grow so big and clear. But the men—I should think they must get tired of doing nothing. They are rather melancholy; and their hands are white. I wonder they don't begin to hate Hyde Park, and kid gloves, and tight boots. Ogilvie," said he, suddenly straightening himself up, "what do you say to the 12th? A few breathers over Ben-an-Sloich would put new lungs into you. I don't think you look quite so limp as most of the London men; but still you are not up to the mark. And then an occasional run out to Coll or Tiree in that old tub of ours, with a brisk sou'-wester blowing across—that would put some mettle into you. Mind you, you won't have any grand banquets at Castle Dare. I think it is

hard on the poor old mother that she should have all the pinching, and none of the squandering; but women seem to have rather a liking for these sacrifices; and both she and Janet are very proud of the family name—I believe they would live on seaweed for a year if only their representative in London could take Buckingham Palace for the season. And Hamish—don't you remember Hamish? He will give you a hearty welcome to Dare; and he will tell you the truth about any salmon or stag you may kill—though he was never known to come within five pounds of the real weight of any big salmon I ever caught. Now then, what do you say?"

"Ah, it is all very well," said Lieutenant Ogilvie. "If we could all get what we want, there would scarcely be an officer in Aldershot Camp on the 12th of August. But I must say there are some capitally good fellows in our mess—and it isn't every one gets the chance you offer me—and there's none of your dog-in-the-manger feeling about them: in short, I do believe, Ogilvie, that I could get off for a week or so about the 20th."

"The 20th? So be it. Then you will have the black-cock added in."

"When do you leave?"

"On the 1st of August—the morning after my garden-party. You must come to it, Ogilvie. Lady Beauregard has persuaded her husband to put off their going to Ireland for three days in order to come. And I have got old Admiral Maitland coming—with his stories of the press-gang, and of Nelson, and of the raids on the merchant-ships for officers for the navy. Did you know that Miss Rawlinson was an old sweetheart of his? He knew her when she lived in Jamaica with her father—several centuries ago, you would think, judging by their stories. Her father got £28,000 from the Government when his slaves were emancipated. I wish I could get the old Admiral up to Dare—he and the mother would have some stories to tell, I think. But you don't like long journeys at ninety-two."

He was in a pleasant and talkative humour, this bright-faced and stalwart young fellow, with his proud, fine features and his careless air. One could easily see how these old folks

had made a sort of pet of him. But while he went on with his desultory chatting about the various people whom he had met, and the friendly invitations he had received, and the hopes he had formed of renewing his acquaintanceship with this person and the next person, should chance bring him again to London soon, he never once mentioned the name of Miss Gertrude White, or referred to her family, or even to her public appearances, about which there was plenty of talk at this time. Yet Lieutenant Ogilvie, on his rare visits to London had more than once heard Sir Keith Macleod's name mentioned in conjunction with that of the young actress whom society was pleased to regard with a special and unusual favour just then; and once or twice he, as Macleod's friend, had been archly questioned on the subject by some inquisitive lady, whose eyes asked more than her words. But Lieutenant Ogilvie was gravely discreet. He neither treated the matter with ridicule nor, on the other hand, did he pretend to know more than he actually knew—which was literally nothing at all. For

Macleod, who was, in ordinary circumstances, anything but a reserved or austere person, was on this subject strictly silent—evading questions with a proud and simple dignity that forbade the repetition of them. *'That which concerns you not, meddle not with'*: he observed the maxim himself, and expected others to do the like.

It was an early dinner they had had, after their stroll in Richmond Park; and it was a comparatively early train that Macleod and his friend now drove down to catch, after he had paid his bill. When they reached Waterloo Station it was not yet eleven o'clock; when he, having bade good-bye to Ogilvie, got to his rooms in Bury Street, it was but a few minutes after. He was joyfully welcomed by his faithful friend, Oscar.

"You poor dog," said he "here have we been enjoying ourselves all the day, and you have been in prison. Come, shall we go for a run?"

Oscar jumped up on him with a whine of delight; he knew what that taking up of the hat again meant, And then there was a

silent stealing down stairs; and a slight, pardonable bark of joy in the hall; and a wild dash into the freedom of the narrow street when the door was opened. Then Oscar moderated his transports, and kept pretty close to his master as together they began to wander through the desert wilds of London.

Piccadilly?—Oscar had grown as expert in avoiding the rattling broughams and hansoms as the veriest mongrel that ever led a vagrant life in London streets. Berkeley Square?—here there was comparative quiet, with the gas-lamps shining up on the thick foliage of the maples. In Grosvenor Square he had a bit of a scamper; but there was no rabbit to hunt. In Oxford Street his master took him into a public-house and gave him a biscuit and a drink of water; after that his spirits rose a bit, and he began to range ahead in Baker Street. But did Oscar know any more than his master why they had taken this direction?

Still further north; and now there were a good many trees about; and the moon, high

in the heavens, touched the trembling foliage, and shone white on the fronts of the houses. Oscar was a friendly companion; but he could not be expected to notice that his master glanced somewhat nervously along South Bank when he had reached the entrance to that thoroughfare. Apparently the place was quite deserted; there was nothing visible but the walls, trees, and houses, one side in black shadow, the other shining cold and pale in the moonlight. After a moment's hesitation Macleod resumed his walk — though he seemed to tread more softly.

And now, in the perfect silence, he neared a certain house, though but little of it was visible over the wall and through the trees. Did he expect to see a light in one of those upper windows, which the drooping acacias did not altogether conceal? He walked quickly by, with his head averted. Oscar had got a good way in front, not doubting that his master was following him.

But Macleod, perhaps having mustered up further courage, stopped in his walk, and re-

turned. This time he passed more slowly, and turned his head to the house, as if listening. There was no light in the windows; there was no sound at all; there was no motion but that of the trembling acacia-leaves as the cold wind of the night stirred them. And then he passed over to the south side of the thoroughfare; and stood in the black shadow of a high wall; and Oscar came, and looked up into his face.

A hansom rattled by; then there was utter stillness again; and the moonlight shone on the front of the small house, which was to all appearance as lifeless as the grave. Then, far away, twelve o'clock struck, and the sound in this intense quiet seemed distant as the sound of a bell at sea.

He was alone with the night, and with the dreams and fancies of the night. Would he, then, confess to himself that which he would confess to no other? Or was it merely some passing whim—some slight underchord of sentiment struck amid the careless joy of a young man's holiday—that had led him up into this silent region of trees and moonlight? The scene

around him was romantic enough; but he certainly had not the features of an anguish-stricken lover.

Again the silence of the night was broken by the rumbling of wheels that came along the road; and now—whatever may have been the fancy that brought him hither—he turned to leave, and Oscar joyfully bounded out into the road. But this plain little brougham, instead of continuing its route, stopped at the gate of the house he had been watching, and two young ladies stepped out. Fionaghal, the Fair Stranger, had not, then, been wandering in the enchanted land of dreams, but toiling home from the scene of her anxious labours? He would have slunk away rapidly but for an untoward accident. Oscar, ranging up and down, came upon an old friend, and instantly made acquaintance with her, on seeing which Macleod, with deep vexation at his heart, but with a pleasant and careless face, had to walk along also.

"What an odd meeting!" said he. "I have been giving Oscar a run. I am glad to have

a chance of bidding you good-night. You are not very tired, I hope?"

"I am rather tired," said she, "but I have only two more nights, and then my holiday begins."

He shook hands with both sisters, and wished them good-night and departed. As Miss Gertrude White went into her father's house, she seemed rather grave.

"Gerty," said the younger sister, as she screwed up the gas, "wouldn't the name of Lady Macleod look well in a play-bill?"

The elder sister would not answer; but as she turned away there was a quick flush of colour in her face—whether caused by anger or by a sudden revelation of her own thought it was impossible to say.

CHAPTER XI.

A FLOWER.

THE many friends Macleod had made in the south—or rather those of them who had remained in town till the end of the season—showed an unwonted interest in this nondescript party of his; and it was at a comparatively early hour in the evening that the various groups of people began to show themselves in Miss Rawlinson's garden. That prim old lady—with her quick, bright ways and her humorous little speeches—studiously kept herself in the background. It was Sir Keith Macleod who was the host. And when he remarked to her that he thought the most beautiful night of all the beautiful time he had spent in the south had been reserved for this very party, she replied—looking round the garden just as if she had been one of his

guests—that it was a pretty scene. And it was a pretty scene. The last fire of the sunset was just touching the topmost branches of the trees. In the colder shade below, the banks and bed of flowers, and the costumes of the ladies, acquired a strange intensity of colour. Then there was a band playing; and a good deal of chatting going on; and one old gentleman with a grizzled moustache humbly receiving lessons in lawn-tennis from an imperious small maiden of ten. Macleod was here, there, and everywhere. The Chinese lanterns outside were to be lit while the people were in at supper. Lieutenant Ogilvie was directed to take in Lady Beauregard when the time arrived.

"You must take her in yourself, Macleod," said that properly-constituted youth. "If you outrage the sacred laws of precedence"——

"I mean to take Miss Rawlinson in to supper," said Macleod; "she is the oldest woman here, and I think my best friend."

"I thought you might wish to give Miss White the place of honour," said Ogilvie out of sheer impertinence; but Macleod went off to

order the candles to be lit in the marquee, where supper was laid.

By and by he came out again; and now the twilight had drawn on apace; there was a cold clear light in the skies, while at the same moment a red glow began to shine through the canvas of the long tent. He walked over to one little group who were seated on a garden-chair.

"Well," said he, "I have got pretty nearly all my people together now, Mrs. Ross."

"But where is Gertrude White?" said Mrs. Ross, "surely she is to be here?"

"Oh, yes, I think so," said he. "Her father and herself both promised to come. You know her holidays have begun now."

"It is a good thing for that girl," said Miss Rawlinson, in her quick, *staccato* fashion, "that she has few holidays. Very good thing that she has her work to mind. The way people run after her would turn any woman's head. The Grand Duke —— is said to have declared that she was one of the three prettiest women that he saw in England: what can you expect if things like that get to a girl's ear?"

"But you know Gerty is quite unspoiled," said Mrs. Ross, warmly.

"Yes; so far," said the old lady, "so far, she retains the courtesy of being hypocritical"——

"Oh, Miss Rawlinson! I won't have you say such things of Gerty White!" Mrs. Ross protested. "You are a wicked old woman—isn't she, Hugh?"

"I am saying it to her credit," continued the old lady, with much composure. "What I say is, that most pretty women who are much run after are flattered into frankness. When they are introduced to you, they don't take the trouble to conceal that they are quite indifferent to you. A plain woman will be decently civil, and will smile, and pretend she is pleased, and talk. A beauty—a recognised beauty—doesn't take the trouble to be hypocritical. Now Miss White does."

"It is an odd sort of compliment," said Colonel Ross, laughing. "What do you think of it, Macleod?"

"These are too great refinements for my

comprehension," said he, modestly. "I think if a pretty woman is uncivil to you, it is easy for you to turn on your heel and go away."

"I do not say uncivil. Don't you go misrepresenting a poor old woman, Sir Keith. I said she is most likely to be flattered into being honest—into showing a stranger that she is quite indifferent, whereas a plain woman will try to make herself a little agreeable. Now a poor lone creature like myself likes to fancy that people are glad to see her; and Miss White pretends as much. It is very kind. By and by she will get spoiled like the rest; and then she will become honest. She will shake hands with me, and then turn off, as much as to say, 'Go away, you ugly old woman, for I can't be bothered with you, and I don't expect any money from you, and why should I pretend to like you?'"

All this was said in a half-jesting way; and it certainly did not at all represent—so far as Macleod had ever made out—the real opinions of her neighbours in the world held by this really kind and gentle old lady. But Macleod

had noticed before that Miss Rawlinson never spoke with any great warmth about Miss Gertrude White's beauty, or her acting, or anything at all connected with her. At this very moment when she was apparently praising the young lady, there was a bitter flavour about what she said. There may be jealousy between sixty-five and nineteen; and if this reflection occurred to Macleod, he no doubt assumed that Miss Rawlinson, if jealous at all, was jealous of Miss Gertrude White's influence over—Mrs. Ross.

"As for Miss White's father," continued the old lady, with a little laugh, "perhaps he believes in those sublime theories of art he is always preaching about. Perhaps he does. They are very fine. One result of them is that his daughter remains on the stage—and earns a handsome income—and he enjoys himself in picking up bits of curiosities"——

"Now that is really unfair," said Mrs. Ross, seriously. "Mr. White is not a rich man, but he has some small means that render him quite independent of any income of his daughter's.

Why, how did they live before they ever thought of letting her try her fortune on the stage? And the money he spent, when it was at last decided she should be carefully taught"——

"Oh, very well!" said Miss Rawlinson, with a smile, but she nodded her head ominously. If that old man was not actually living on his daughter's earnings, he had at least strangled his mother, or robbed the Bank of England, or done something or other. Miss Rawlinson was obviously not well disposed either to Mr. White or to his daughter.

At this very moment both these persons made their appearance, and certainly, as this slender and graceful figure, clad in a pale summer costume, came across the lawn, and as a smile of recognition lit up the intelligent fine face, those critics sitting there must have acknowledged that Gertrude White was a singularly pretty woman. And then the fascination of that low-toned voice! She began to explain to Macleod why they were so late. Some trifling accident had happened to Carry. But, as the simple, pathetic tones told him the story, his

heart was filled with a great gentleness and pity towards that poor victim of misfortune. He was struck with remorse because he had sometimes thought harshly of the poor child, on account of a mere occasional bit of pertness. His first message from the highlands would be to her.

"*O Willie brewed a peck o' maut*" the band played merrily as the gay company took their seats at the long banquet-table, Macleod leading in the prim old dame who had placed her house at his disposal. There was a blaze of light and colour in this spacious marquee. Bands of scarlet cloth took the place of oaken rafters; there were huge blocks of ice on the table, each set in a miniature lake that was filled with white water-lilies; there were masses of flowers and fruits from one end to the other; and by the side of each *menu* lay a tiny nosegay, in the centre of which was a sprig of bell-heather. This last was a notion of Macleod's amiable hostess; she had made up these miniature bouquets herself. But she had been forestalled in the pretty compliment. Macleod had not seen much of Miss Gertrude White in the cold

twilight outside. Now, in this blaze of yellow light, he turned his eyes to her, as she sat there demurely flirting with an old admiral of ninety-two, who was one of Macleod's special friends. And what was that flower she wore in her bosom —the sole piece of colour in the costume of white? That was no sprig of blood-red bell-heather, but a bit of real heather—of the common ling; and it was set amid a few leaves of juniper. Now the juniper is the badge of the Clan Macleod. She wore it next her heart.

There was laughter, and wine, and merry talking. '*Last May a braw wooer*' the band played now; but they scarcely listened.

"Where is your piper, Sir Keith?" said Lady Beauregard.

"At this moment," said he, "I should not wonder if he was down at the shore, waiting for me."

"You are going away quite soon then?"

"To-morrow. But I don't wish to speak of it. I should like to-night to last for ever."

Lady Beauregard was interrupted by her neighbour.

"What has pleased you, then, so much?" said his hostess, looking up at him. "London? Or the people in it? Or any one person in it?"

"Oh!" he said laughingly, "the whole thing. What is the use of dissecting? It is nothing but holiday-making in this place. Now, Miss Rawlinson, are you brave? Won't you challenge the admiral to drink a glass of wine with you? And you must include his companion—just as they do at the city dinners—and I will join too."

And so these old sweethearts drank to each other. And Macleod raised his glass, too; and Miss White lowered her eyes, and perhaps flushed a little as she touched hers with her lips; for she had not often been asked to take a part in this old-fashioned ceremony. But that was not the only custom they revived that evening. After the banquet was over; and the ladies had got some light shawls and gone out into the mild summer night; and when the long marquee was cleared, and the band installed at the farther end; then there was a murmured talk

of a minuet. Who could dance it? Should they try it?

"You know it?" said Macleod to Miss White.

"Yes," said she, looking down.

"Will you be my partner?"

"With pleasure," she answered, but there was some little surprise in her voice, which he at once detected.

"Oh," said he, "the mother taught me when I was a child. She and I used to have grand dances together. And Hamish, he taught me the sword-dance."

"Do you know the sword-dance?" she said.

"Any one can know it," said he, "it is more difficult to do it. But at one time I could dance it with four of the thickest-handled dirks instead of the two swords."

"I hope you will show us your skill to-night," she said, with a smile.

"Do you think any one can dance the sword-dance without the pipes?" said he, quite simply.

And now some of the younger people had made bold to try this minuet; and Macleod led his partner up to the head of the improvised

ballroom; and the slow and graceful music began. That was a pretty sight for those walking outside in the garden. So warm was the night that the canvas of one side of the marquee had been removed; and those walking about in the dark outside could look into this gaily-lighted place with the beautifully-coloured figures moving to the slow music. And as they thus walked along the gravel-paths, or under the trees, the stems of which were decorated with spirals of coloured lamps, a new light arose in the south to shed a further magic over the scene. Almost red at first, the full moon cleared as it rose, until the trees and bushes were touched with a silver radiance, and the few people who walked about threw black shadows on the greensward and gravel. In an arbour at the furthest end of the garden a number of Chinese lanterns shed a dim coloured light on a table and a few rocking-chairs. There were cigarettes on the table.

By and by, from out of the brilliancy of the tent, stepped Macleod and Fionaghal herself, she leaning on his arm, a light scarf thrown

round her neck. She uttered a slight cry of surprise when she saw the picture this garden presented—the coloured cups on the trees, the swinging lanterns, the broader sheen of the moonlight spreading over the foliage, and the lawn, and the walks.

"It is like fairy-land!" she said.

They walked along the winding gravel-paths; and now that some familiar quadrille was being danced in that brilliant tent, there were fewer people out here in the moonlight.

"I should begin to believe that romance was possible," she said, with a smile, "if I often saw a beautiful scene like this. It is what we try to get in the theatre; but I see all the bare boards and the limelight—I don't have a chance of believing in it."

"Do you have a chance of believing in anything," said he, "on the stage?"

"I don't understand you," she said, gently; for she was sure he would not mean the rudeness that his words literally conveyed.

"And perhaps I cannot explain," said he. "But—but your father was talking the other

day about your giving yourself up altogether to your art—living the lives of other people for the time being—forgetting yourself—sacrificing yourself—having no life of your own but that. What must the end of it be?—that you play with emotions and beliefs until you have no faith in any one—none left for yourself—it is only the material of your art. Would you not rather like to live your own life?"

He had spoken rather hesitatingly; and he was not at all sure that he had quite conveyed to her his meaning—though he had thought over the subject long enough and often enough to get his own impressions of it clear.

At another time, and in a more critical mood, she might have said to herself, "*This man hates the stage because he is jealous of its hold on my life,*" and might have rejoiced over the inadvertent confession. But just at this moment these hesitating words of his seemed to have awakened some quick responsive thrill in her nature, for she suddenly said, with an earnestness that was not at all assumed—

"Sometimes I have thought of that—it is so strange to hear my own doubts repeated. If I could choose my own life—yes, I would rather live that out than merely imagining the experiences of others. But what is one to do? You look around, and take the world as it is. Can anything be more trivial and disappointing? When you are Juliet in the balcony, or Rosalind in the forest, then you have some better feeling within you, if it is only for an hour or so."

"Yes," said he, "and you go on indulging in those doses of fictitious sentiment until—— But I am afraid the night air is too cold for you. Shall we go back?"

She could not fail to notice the trace of bitterness, and subsequent coldness, with which he spoke. She knew that he must have been thinking deeply over this matter; and that it was no ordinary thing that caused him to speak with so much feeling. But of course, when he proposed that they should return to the marquee, she consented. He could not expect her to stand there and defend her whole manner of life.

Much less could he expect her to give up her profession merely because he had exercised his wits in getting up some fantastic theory about it. And she began to think that he had no right to talk to her in this bitter fashion.

When they had got half way back to the tent, he paused for a moment.

"I am going to ask a favour of you," he said in a low voice. "I have spent a pleasant time in England, and I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for letting me become one of your friends. To-morrow morning I am going back home. I should like you to give me that flower—as some little token of remembrance.

The small fingers did not tremble at all as she took the flower from her dress. She presented it to him with a charming smile, and without a word. What was the giving of a flower? There was a cart-load of roses in the tent.

But this flower she had worn next her heart.

CHAPTER XII.

WHITE HEATHER.

And now, behold! the red flag flying from the summit of Castle Dare—a spot of brilliant colour in this world of whirling mist and flashing sunlight. For there is half a gale blowing in from the Atlantic; and gusty clouds come sweeping over the islands, so that now the Dutchman, and now Lunga, and now Colonsay disappears from sight, and then emerges into the sunlight again, dripping and shining after the bath; while ever and anon the huge promontory of Ru-Treshanish shows a gloomy purple far in the north. But the wind and the weather may do what they like to-day: for has not the word just come down from the hill that the smoke of the steamer has been made out in the south? and old Hamish

is flying this way and that, fairly at his wits' end with excitement; and Janet Macleod has cast a last look at the decorations of heather and juniper in the great hall; while Lady Macleod, dressed in the most stately fashion, has declared that she is as able as the youngest of them to walk down to the point to welcome home her son.

"Ay, your leddyship, it is very bad," complains the distracted Hamish, "that it will be so rough a day this day, and Sir Keith not to come ashore in his own gig, but in a fishing-boat, and to come ashore at the fishing-quay, too! but it is his own men will go out for him, and not the fishermen at all, though I am sure they will hef a dram whatever, when Sir Keith comes ashore. And will you not tek the pony, your leddyship? for it is a long road to the quay."

"No, I will not take the pony, Hamish," said the tall white-haired dame; "and it is not of much consequence what boat Sir Keith has, so long as he comes back to us. And now I think you had better go down to the

quay yourself, and see that the cart is waiting and the boat ready."

But how could old Hamish go down to the quay? He was in his own person skipper, head-keeper, steward, butler, and general major-domo, and ought on such a day to be in half-a-dozen places at once. From the earliest morning he had been hurrying hither and thither, in his impatience making use of much voluble Gaelic. He had seen the yacht's crew in their new jerseys. He had been round the kennels. He had got out a couple of bottles of the best claret that Castle Dare could afford. He had his master's letters arranged on the library-table; and had given a final rub to the guns and rifles on the rack. He had even been down to the quay, swearing at the salmon-fishers for having so much lumber lying about the place where Sir Keith Macleod was to land. And if he was to go down to the quay now, how could he be sure that the ancient Christina, who was mistress of the kitchen as far as her husband Hamish would allow her to be, would remember all his instructions? And

then the little grand-daughter, Christina—would she remember her part in the ceremony?

However, as Hamish could not be in six places at once, he at length decided to obey his mistress's directions, and went hurriedly off to the quay, overtaking on his way Donald the piper-lad, who was apparelled in all his professional finery.

"And if ever you put wind in your pipes, you will put wind in your pipes this day, Donald," said he to the red-haired lad. "And I will tell you now what you will play when you come ashore from the steamer—it is the *Farewell to Chubralter* you will play."

"The *Farewell to Gibralter!*" said Donald peevishly, for he was bound in honour to let no man interfere with his proper business. "It is a better march than that I will play, Hamish. It is the *Heights of Alma*, that was made by Mr. Ross, the Queen's own piper; and will you tell me that the *Heights of Alma* is not a better march than the *Farewell to Gibralter?*

Hamish pretended to pay no heed to this

impertinent boy. His eye was fixed on a distant black speck that was becoming more and more pronounced out there amid the greys and greens of the windy and sunlit sea. Occasionally it disappeared altogether, as a cloud of rain swept across towards the giant cliffs of Mull; and then again it would appear, sharper and blacker than ever, while the masts and funnel were now visible as well as the hull. When Donald and his companion got down to the quay, they found the men already in the big boat, getting ready to hoist the huge brown lug-sail; and there was a good deal of laughing and talking going on, perhaps in anticipation of the dram they were sure to get when their master returned to Castle Dare. Donald jumped down on the rude stone ballast, and made his way up to the bow; Hamish, who remained on shore, helped to shove her off; then the heavy lug-sail was quickly hoisted, the sheet hauled tight, and presently the broad-beamed boat was ploughing its way through the rushing sea, with an occasional cloud of spray coming right over her from stem to stern.

"*Fhir a bhata,*" the men sung; until Donald struck in with his pipes, and the wild skirl of *The Barren Rocks of Aden* was a fitter sort of music to go with these sweeping winds and plunging seas.

And now we will board the steamer, where Keith Macleod is up on the bridge, occasionally using a glass, and again talking to the captain, who is beside him. First of all on board he had caught sight of the red flag floating over Castle Dare; and his heart had leaped up at that sign of welcome. Then he could make out the dark figures on the quay; and the hoisting of the lug-sail; and the putting off of the boat. It was not a good day for observing things; for heavy clouds were quickly passing over, followed by bewildering gleams of a sort of watery sunlight; but, as it happened, one of these sudden flashes chanced to light up a small plateau on the side of the hill above the quay, just as the glass was directed on that point. Surely—surely—those two figures?

"Why, it is the mother—and Janet!" he cried.

He hastily gave the glass to his companion.

"Look!" said he. "Don't you think that is Lady Macleod and my cousin? What could have tempted the old lady to come away down there on such a squally day?"

"Oh yes, I think it is the ladies," said the captain; and then he added, with a friendly smile, "and I think it is to see you all the sooner, Sir Keith, that they have come down to the shore."

"Then," said he, "I must go down and get my gillie, and show him his future home."

He went below the hurricane-deck to a corner in which Oscar was chained up. Beside the dog, sitting on a camp-stool and wrapped round with a tartan plaid, was the person whom Macleod had doubtless referred to as his gillie. He was not a distinguished-looking attendant to be travelling with a Highland chieftain.

"Johnny, my man, come on deck now, and I will show you where you are going to live. You're all right, now, aren't you? And you

will be on the solid land again in about ten minutes."

Macleod's gillie rose—or rather, got down—from the camp-stool, and showed himself to be a miserable, emaciated child of ten or eleven, with a perfectly colourless face, frightened grey eyes, and starved white hands. The contrast between the bronzed and bearded sailors—who were now hurrying about to receive the boat from Dare—and this pallid and shrunken scrap of humanity was striking; and when Macleod took his hand, and half led and half carried him up on deck, the look of terror that he directed on the plunging waters all around showed that he had not had much experience of the sea. Involuntarily he had grasped hold of Macleod's coat as if for protection.

"Now, Johnny, look right ahead. Do you see the big house on the cliffs over yonder?"

The child, still clinging on to his protector, looked all round with the dull, pale eyes, and at length said—

"No."

"Can't you see that house, poor chap? Well, do you see that boat over there? You must be able to see that."

"Yes, sir."

"That boat is to take you ashore. You needn't be afraid. If you don't like to look at the sea, get down into the bottom of the boat, and take Oscar with you; and you'll see nothing until you are ashore. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come along then."

For now the wild skirl of Donald's pipes was plainly audible; and the various packages —the new rifle, the wooden case containing the wonderful dresses for Lady Macleod and her niece, and what not—were all ranged ready; to say nothing of some loaves of white bread that the steward was sending ashore at Hamish's request. And then the heaving boat came closer to, her sail was hauled down, and a rope thrown and caught; and then there was a hazardous scrambling down the dripping iron steps, and a notable spring on the part

of Oscar, who had escaped from the hands of the sailors. As for the new gillie, he resembled nothing so much as a limp bunch of clothes as Macleod's men, wondering not a little, caught him up and passed him astern. Then the rope was thrown off, the steamer steamed slowly ahead, the lug-sail was run up again, and away the boat plunged, with Donald playing the *Heights of Alma* as though he would rend the skies.

"Hold your noise, Donald!" his master called to him, laughing. "You will have plenty of time to play the pipes in the evening."

For he was greatly delighted to be among his own people again; and he was eager in his questions of the men as to all that had happened in his absence; and it was no small thing to them that Sir Keith Macleod should remember their affairs too, and ask after their families and friends. Donald's loyalty was stronger than his professional pride. He was not offended that he had been silenced; he only bottled up his musical fervour all the more; and at length, as he neared the land, and knew that Lady

Macleod and Miss Macleod were within hearing, he took it that he knew better than any one else what was proper to the occasion, and once more the proud and stirring march strove with the sound of the hurrying waves. Nor was that all. The piper-lad was doing his best. Never before had he put such fire into his work; but as they got close in shore the joy in his heart got altogether the mastery of him, and away he broke into the mad delight of *Lady Mary Ramsay's Reel.* Hamish on the quay heard, and he strutted about as if he were himself playing, and that before the Queen. And then he heard another sound—that of Macleod's voice.

"*Stand by, lads! . . . Down with her!*"—and the flapping sail, with its swinging yard, rattled down into the boat. At the same moment Oscar made a clean spring into the water, gained the landing-steps, and dashed upwards—dripping as he was—to two ladies who were standing on the quay above. And Janet Macleod so far forgot what was due to her best gown that she caught his head

in her arms, as he pawed and whined with delight.

That was a glad enough party that started off and up the hill-side for Castle Dare. Janet Macleod did not care to conceal that she had been crying a little bit; and there were proud tears in the eyes of the stately old dame who walked with her; but the most excited of all was Hamish, who could by no means be got to understand that his master did not all at once want to hear about the trial of the young setters, and the price of the sheep sold the week before at Tobermory, and the stag that was chased by the Carsaig men on Tuesday.

"Confound it! Hamish," Macleod said, laughing, "leave all those things till after dinner."

"Oh ay, oh ay, Sir Keith, we will hef plenty of time after dinner," said Hamish, just as if he were one of the party, but very nervously working with the ends of his thumbs all the time; "and I will tell you of the fine big stag that has been coming down every night—every night, as I am a living man—to Mrs. Murdoch's corn; and I wass saying to her, 'Just hold your

tongue, Mrs. Murdoch,' that wass what I will say to her, 'just hold your tongue, Mrs. Murdoch, and be a civil woman, for a day or two days, and when Sir Keith comes home, it iss no more at ahl the stag will trouble you—oh no, no more at ahl —there will be no more trouble about the stag when Sir Keith comes home.' "

And old Hamish laughed at his own wit—but it was in a sort of excited way.

"Look here, Hamish—I want you to do this for me," Macleod said; and instantly the face of the old man—it was a fine face, too, with its aquiline nose, and grizzled hair, and keen, hawk-like eyes—was full of an eager attention. "Go back and fetch that little boy I left with Donald. You had better look after him yourself. I don't think any water came over him; but give him dry clothes if he is wet at all. And feed him up; the little beggar will take a lot of fattening without any harm."

"Where is he to go?" said Hamish, doubtfully.

"You are to make a keeper of him. When you have fattened him up a bit, teach him to

feed the dogs. When he gets bigger, he can clean the guns."

"I will let no man or boy clean the guns for you but myself, Sir Keith," the old man said, quite simply, and without a shadow of disrespect. "I will hef no risk of the kind."

"Very well, then; but go and get the boy, and make him at home as much as you can. Feed him up."

"Who is it, Keith," his cousin said, "that you are speaking of as if he was a sheep or a calf?"

"Faith," said he, laughing, "if the philanthropists heard of it, they would prosecute me for slave-stealing. I bought the boy—for a sovereign."

"I think you have made a bad bargain, Keith," his mother said; but she was quite prepared to hear of some absurd whim of his.

"Well," said he, "I was going into Trafalgar Square, where the National Gallery of pictures is, mother, and there is a cab-stand in the street, and there was a cabman standing there, munching at a lump of dry bread, that he cut

with a jack-knife. I never saw a cabman do that before; I should have been less surprised if he had been having a chicken and a bottle of port. However, in front of the big cabman, this little chap I have brought with me was standing; quite in rags; no shoes on his feet; no cap on his wild hair; and he was looking fixedly at the big lump of bread. I never saw any animal look so starved and so hungry; his eyes were quite glazed with the fascination of seeing the man ploughing away at this lump of loaf. And I never saw any child so thin. His hands were like the claws of a bird; and his trousers were short and torn, so that you could see his legs were like two pipe-stems. At last the cabman saw him. 'Get out o' the way,' says he. The little chap slunk off, frightened, I suppose. Then the man changed his mind. 'Come here,' says he. But the little chap was frightened, and wouldn't come back; so he went after him, and thrust the loaf into his hand, and bade him be off. I can tell you the way he went into that loaf was very fine to see. It was like a weasel at the neck of a rabbit; it was like an

otter at the back of a salmon. And that was how I made his acquaintance," Macleod added carelessly.

"But you have not told us why you brought him up here," his mother said.

"Oh," said he, with a sort of laugh, "I was looking at him, and I wondered whether Highland mutton and Highland air would make any difference in the wretched little skeleton; and so I made his acquaintance. I went home with him to a fearful place—I have got the address, but I did not know there were such quarters in London—and I saw his mother. The poor woman was very ill; and she had a lot of children; and she seemed quite glad when I offered to take this one and make a herd or a gamekeeper of him. I promised he should go to visit her once a year, that she might see whether there was any difference. And I gave her a sovereign."

"You were quite right, Keith," his cousin said gravely; "you run a great risk. Do they hang slavers?"

"Mother," said he, for by this time the ladies

were standing still, so that Hamish and the new gillie should overtake them, "you mustn't laugh at the little chap when you see him with the plaid taken off. The fact is, I took him to a shop in the neighbourhood to get some clothes for him, but I couldn't get anything small enough. He *does* look ridiculous; but you mustn't laugh at him, for he is like a girl for sensitiveness. But when he has been fed up a bit, and got some Highland air into his lungs, his own mother won't know him. And you will get him some other clothes, Janet—a kilt maybe —when his legs get stronger."

Whatever Keith Macleod did was sure to be right in his mother's eyes; and she only said, with a laugh—

"Well, Keith, you are not like your brothers. When they brought me home presents, it was pretty things; but all your curiosities, wherever you go, are the halt and the lame and the blind, so that the people laugh at you and say that Castle Dare is becoming the hospital of Mull."

"Mother, I don't care what the people say."

"And indeed I know that," she answered.

Their waiting had allowed Hamish and the new gillie to overtake them, and certainly the latter—deprived of his plaid—presented a sufficiently ridiculous appearance in the trousers and jacket that were obviously too big for him. But neither Lady Macleod nor Janet laughed at all when they saw this starved London waif before them.

"Johnny," said Macleod, "here are two ladies who will be very kind to you, so you needn't be afraid to live here."

But Johnny did look mortally afraid, and instinctively once more took hold of Macleod's coat. Then he seemed to have some notion of his duty. He drew back one foot, and made a sort of curtsey. Probably he had seen girls do this, in mock-heroic fashion, in some London court.

"And are you very tired?" said Janet Macleod, in that soft voice of hers that all children loved.

"Yes," said the child.

"Kott bless me!" cried Hamish, "I did not

know that!"—and therewith the old man caught up Johnny Wickes as if he had been a bit of ribbon, and flung him on to his shoulder, and marched off to Castle Dare.

Then the three Macleods continued on their way—through the damp-smelling fir-wood; over the bridge that spanned the brawling brook; again through the fir-wood; until they reached the open space surrounding the big stone house. They stood for a minute there—high over the great plain of the sea, that was beautiful with a thousand tints of light. And there was the green island of Ulva, and there the darker rocks of Colonsay, and farther out, amid the windy vapour and sunlight, Lunga, and Fladda, and the Dutchman's Cap, changing in their hue every minute as the clouds came driving over the sea.

"Mother," said he, "I have not tasted fresh air since I left. I am not sorry to get back to Dare."

"And I don't think we are sorry to see you back, Keith," his cousin said modestly.

And yet the manner of his welcome was

not imposing; they are not very good at grand ceremonies on the western shores of Mull. It is true that Donald, relieved of the care of Johnny Wickes, had sped by a short-cut through the fir-wood, and was now standing in the gravelled space outside the house, playing the *Heights of Alma* with a spirit worthy of all the Mac Cruimins that ever lived. But as for the ceremony of welcome, this was all there was of it. When Keith Macleod went up to the hall-door, he found a small girl of five or six standing quite by herself at the open entrance. This was Christina, the grand-daughter of Hamish, a pretty little girl with wide blue eyes and yellow hair.

"Hallo, Christina," said Macleod, "won't you let me into the house?"

"This is for you, Sir Keith," said she in the Gaelic, and she presented him with a beautiful bunch of white heather. Now white heather, in that part of the country, is known to bring great good fortune to the possessor of it.

"And it is a good omen," said he, lightly, as he took the child up and kissed her. And that was the manner of his welcome to Castle Dare.

MACLEOD'S RETURN.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT HOME.

THE two women-folk with whom he was most nearly brought into contact were quite convinced that his stay in London had in no wise altered the buoyant humour and brisk activity of Keith Macleod. Castle Dare awoke into a new life on his return. He was all about and over the place, accompanied by the faithful Hamish; and he had a friendly word and smile for every one he met. He was a good master: perhaps he was none the less liked because it was pretty well understood that he meant to be master. His good-nature had nothing of weakness in it. "If you love me, I love you," says the Gaelic proverb; "*otherwise do not come near me.*" There was not a man or lad about the place

who would not have adventured his life for Macleod; but all the same they were well aware that the handsome young master, who seemed to go through life with a merry laugh on his face, was not one to be trifled with. This John Fraser, an Aberdeen man, discovered on the second night after Macleod's return to Castle Dare.

Macleod had the salmon-fishing on this part of the coast, and had a boat's crew of four men engaged in the work. One of these having fallen sick, Hamish had to hire a new hand, an Aberdeenshire man, who joined the crew just before Macleod's departure from London. This Fraser turned out to be a "dour" man; and his discontent and grumbling seemed to be affecting the others, so that the domestic peace of Dare was threatened. On the night in question, old Hamish came into Macleod's conjoint library and gun-room.

"The fishermen hef been asking me again, sir," observed Hamish, with his cap in his hand. "What will I say to them?"

"Oh, about the wages?" Macleod said, turning round.

"Ay, sir."

"Well, Hamish, I don't object. Tell them that what they say is right. This year has been a very good year; we have made some money; I will give them the two shillings a week more if they like. But then, look here, Hamish: if they have their wages raised in a good year, they must have them lowered in a bad year. They cannot expect to share the profit without sharing the loss too. Do you understand that, Hamish?"

"Yes, Sir Keith, I think I do."

"Do you think you could put it into good Gaelic for them?"

"Oh ay."

"Then tell them to choose for themselves. But make it clear."

"Ay, Sir Keith," said Hamish; "and if it was not for that —— man, John Fraser, there would be no word of this thing at ahl. And there is another thing I will hef to speak to you about, Sir Keith; and it is John Fraser, too,

who is at the bottom of this. I will know that fine. It is more than two or three times that you will warn the men not to bathe in the bay below the Castle: and not for many a day will any one do that, for the Cave bay, it is not more as half a mile away. And when you were in London, Sir Keith, it was this man John Fraser he would bathe in the bay below the Castle in the morning, and he got one or two of the others to join him; and when I bade him go away, he will say that the sea belongs to no man. And this morning, too——"

"This morning!" Macleod said, jumping to his feet. There was an angry flash in his eyes.

"Ay, sir, this very morning I saw two of them myself—and John Fraser he was one of them—and I went down and said to them, 'It will be a bad day for you,' says I to them, 'if Sir Keith will find you in this bay.'"

"Are they down at the quay now?" Macleod said.

"Ay, they will be in the house now."

"Come along with me, Hamish. I think we will put this right."

He lifted his cap and went out into the cool night air, followed by Hamish. They passed through the dark fir-wood until they came in sight of the Atlantic again, which was smooth enough to show the troubled reflection of the bigger stars. They went down the hill-side until they were close to the shore; and then they followed the rough path to the quay. The door of the square stone building was open; the men were seated on rude stools or on spare coils of rope, smoking. Macleod called them out, and they came to the door.

"Now look here, lads," said he: "you know I will not allow any man to bathe in the bay before the house. I told you before; I tell you now for the last time. They that want to bathe can go along to the Cave bay; and the end of it is this—and there will be no more words about it—that the first man I catch in the bay before the house, I will take a horsewhip to him, and he will have as good a run as ever he had in his life!"

With that he was turning away, when he heard one of the men mutter, "*I would like to see you do it.*" He wheeled round instantly —and if some of his London friends could have seen the look of his face at this moment, they might have altered their opinion about the obliteration of certain qualities from the temperament of the Highlanders of our own day.

"Who said that?" he exclaimed.

There was no answer.

"Come out here, you four men!" he said. "Stand in a line there. Now let the man who said that step out and face me. I will show him who is to be master here. If he thinks he can master me, well: but it is one or the other of us who will be master!"

There was not a sound or a motion; but Macleod suddenly sprang forward, caught the man Fraser by the throat, and shook him thrice—as he might have shaken a reed.

"You scoundrel!" he said; "you coward!—are you afraid to own it was you? There has been nothing but bad feeling since ever you

brought your ugly face among us—well, we've had enough of you!"

He flung him back.

"Hamish," said he, "you will pay this man his month's wages to-night. Pack him off with the Gometra men in the morning; they will take him out to the *Pioneer*. And look you here, sir," he added, turning to Fraser, "it will be a bad day for you the day that I see your face again anywhere about Castle Dare."

He walked off and up to the house again, followed by the reluctant Hamish. Hamish had spoken of this matter only that Macleod should give the men a renewed warning; he had no notion that this act of vengeance would be the result. And where were they to get a man to put in Fraser's place?

It was about an hour later that Hamish again came into the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, "but the men are outside."

"I cannot see them."

"They are ferry sorry, sir, about the whole matter, and there will be no more bathing in

the front of the house, and the man Fraser they hef brought him up to say he is ferry sorry too."

"They have brought him up?"

"Ay, sir," said Hamish with a grave smile. "It wass for fighting him they were, one after the other, because he will make a bad speech to you; and he could not fight three men, one after the other; and so they hef made him come up to say he is ferry sorry too; and will you let him stay on to the end of the season?"

"No. Tell the men that if they will behave themselves, we can go on as we did before, in peace and friendliness; but I mean to be master in this place. And I will not have a sulky fellow like this Fraser stirring up quarrels. He must pack and be off."

"It will not be easy to get another man, Sir Keith," old Hamish ventured to say.

"Get Dougal Black or Coll Black over from Ulva; or you can bring Duncan from the yacht, surely?"

"But you will want the yacht, sir, when Mr. Ogilvie comes to Dare?"

"I tell you, Hamish, that I will not have that fellow about the place—that is an end of it. Did you think it was only a threat that I meant? And have you not heard the old saying that 'one does not apply plaster to a threat'? You will send him to Gometra in the morning in time for the boat."

And so the sentence of banishment was confirmed; and Hamish got one of the numerous Blacks of Ulva to take the place of Fraser; and from that time to the end of the fishing season perfect peace and harmony prevailed between master and men.

But if Lady Macleod and Janet saw no change whatever in Macleod's manner after his return from the south, Hamish, who was more alone with the young man, did. Why this strange indifference to the very occupations that used to be the chief interest of his life? He would not go out after the deer: the velvet would be on their horns yet. He would not go out after the grouse: what was the use of disturbing them before Mr. Ogilvie came up?

"I am in no hurry," he said, almost petulantly.

"Shall I not have to be here the whole winter for the shooting?"—and Hamish was amazed to hear him talk of the winter shooting as some compulsory duty, whereas in these parts it far exceeds in variety and interest the very limited low-ground shooting of the autumn. Until young Ogilvie came up, Macleod never had a gun in his hand. He had gone fishing two or three days; but had generally ended by surrendering his rod to Hamish, and going for a walk up the glen, alone. The only thing he seemed to care about, in the way of out-of-door occupation, was the procuring of otter-skins; every man and boy in his service was ordered to keep a sharp look-out on that stormy coast for the prince of fur-bearing animals. Years before he had got enough skins together for a jacket for his cousin Janet; and that garment of beautiful, thick, black fur—dyed black, of course—was as silken and rich as when it was made. Why should he forget his own theory of letting all animals have a chance in urging a war of extermination against the otter?

This pre-occupation of mind, of which Hamish

was alone observant, was nearly inflicting a cruel injury on Hamish himself. On the morning of the day on which Norman Ogilvie was expected to arrive, Hamish went into his master's library. Macleod had been reading a book; but he had pushed it aside; and now both his elbows were on the table, and he was leaning his head on his hands, apparently in deep meditation of some kind or other.

"Will I tek the bandage off Nell's foot now, sir?"

"Oh, yes, if you like. You know as much as I do about it."

"Oh, I am quite sure," said Hamish brightly, "that she will be ahl quite well to-morrow. I will tek her whateffer; and I can send her home if it is too much for her."

Macleod took up his book again.

"Very well, Hamish. But you have plenty to do about the house. Duncan and Sandy can go with us to-morrow."

The old man started, and looked at his master for a second. Then he said, "Whateffer is your will, sir," in a low voice, and left the room.

But for the hurt, and the wounded, and the sorrowful, there was always one refuge of consolation in Castle Dare. Hamish went straight to Janet Macleod; and she was astonished to see the emotion of which the keen, hard, handsome face of the old man was capable. Who before had ever seen tears in the eyes of Hamish MacIntyre?

"And perhaps it is so," said Hamish, with his head hanging down, "and perhaps it is that I am an old man now, and not able any more to go up to the hills; but if I am not able for that, I am not able for anything; and I will not ask Sir Keith to keep me about the house or about the yacht. It is younger men will do better as me; and I can go away to Greenock; and if it is an old man I am, maybe I will find a place in a smack, for all that——"

"Oh nonsense, Hamish," Janet Macleod said, with her kindly eyes bent on him. "You may be sure Sir Keith did not mean anything like that——"

"Ay, mem," said the old man proudly, "and who wass it that first put a gun into his hand;

and who wass it skinned the ferry first seal that he shot in Loch Scridain; and who wass it told him the name of every spar and sheet of the *Umpire*, and showed him how to hold a tiller? And if there is any man knows more as me about the birds, and the deer, that is right—let him go out; but it is the first day I hef not been out with Sir Keith since ever I wass at Castle Dare; and now it iss time that I am going away; for I am an old man, and the younger men they will be better on the hills and in the yacht too. But I can make my living whatever."

"Hamish, you are speaking like a foolish man," said Janet Macleod to him. "You will wait here now till I go to Sir Keith."

She went to him.

"Keith," said she, "do you know that you have nearly broken old Hamish's heart?"

"What is the matter?" said he, looking up in wonder.

"He says you have told him he is not to go out to the shooting with you to-morrow; and that is the first time he has been superseded; and he takes it that you think he is an old man; and

he talks of going away to Greenock to join a smack."

"Oh, nonsense," Macleod said. "I was not thinking when I told him. He may come with us if he likes. At the same time, Janet, I should think Norman Ogilvie will laugh at seeing the butler come out as a keeper."

"You know quite well, Keith," said his cousin, "that Hamish is no more a butler than he is captain of the *Umpire* or clerk of the accounts. Hamish is simply everybody and everything at Castle Dare. And if you speak of Norman Ogilvie—well, I think it would be more like yourself, Keith, to consult the feelings of an old man rather than the opinions of a young one."

"You are always on the right side, Janet. Tell Hamish I am very sorry. I meant him no disrespect. And he may call me at one in the morning if he likes. He never looked on me but as a bit of his various machinery for killing things."

"That is not fair of you, Keith. Old Hamish would give his right hand to save you the scratch of a thorn."

She went off to cheer the old man; and he turned to his book. But it was not to read it; it was only to stare at the outside of it, in an absent sort of way. The fact is, he had found in it the story of a young aide-de-camp who was entrusted with a message to a distant part of the field while a battle was going forward, and who in mere bravado rode across a part of the ground open to the enemy's fire. He came back laughing. He had been hit, he confessed; but he had escaped; and he carelessly shook a drop or two of blood from a flesh-wound on his hand. Suddenly, however, he turned pale, wavered a little, and then fell forward on his horse's neck, a corpse.

Macleod was thinking about this story rather gloomily. But at last he got up with a more cheerful air, and seized his cap.

"And if it is my death-wound I have got," he was thinking to himself, as he set out for the boat that was waiting for him at the shore, "I will not cry out too soon."

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND.

His death-wound! There was but little suggestion of any death-wound about the manner or speech of this light-hearted and frank-spoken fellow who now welcomed his old friend Ogilvie ashore. He swung the gun-case into the cart as if it had been a bit of thread. He himself would carry Ogilvie's top-coat over his arm.

"And why have you not come in your hunting tartan?" said he, observing the very precise and correct shooting costume of the young man.

"Not likely," said Mr. Ogilvie, laughing. "I don't like walking through clouds with bare knees, with a chance of sitting down on an adder or two. And I'll tell you what it is, Macleod: if the morning is wet I will not go out stalking, if all the stags in Christendom were

there. I know what it is, I have had enough of it in my younger days"——

"My dear fellow," Macleod said seriously, "you must not talk here as if you could do what you liked. It is not what you wish to do, or what you don't wish to do; it is what Hamish orders to have done. Do you think I would dare to tell Hamish what we must do to-morrow? And do you think in any case Hamish would allow a kilt to be worn when we go off stalking?"

"Very well, then, I will see Hamish myself; I dare say he remembers me."

And he did see Hamish that evening, and it was arranged between them that if the morning looked threatening they would leave the deer alone, and would merely take the lower lying moors in the immediate neighbourhood of Castle Dare. And Hamish took great care to impress on the young man that Macleod had not yet taken a gun in his hand, merely that there should be a decent bit of shooting when his guest arrived.

"And he will say to me, only yesterday," observed Hamish confidentially, "it was yester-

day itself he wass saying to me, 'Hamish, when Mr. Ogilvie comes here, it will only be six days or seven days he will be able to stop, and you will try to get him two or three stags. And Hamish,' this iss what he will say to me, 'you will pay no heed to me, for I hef plenty of the shooting whatever, from the one year's end to the other year's end, and it is Mr. Ogilvie you will look after.' And you do not mind the rain, sir? It iss fine warm clothes you have got on—fine woollen clothes you have, and what harm will a shower do?"

"Oh, I don't mind the rain, so long as I can keep moving—that's the fact, Hamish," replied Mr. Ogilvie; "but I don't like lying in wet heather for an hour at a stretch. And I don't care how few birds there are; there will be plenty to keep us walking. So you remember me after all, Hamish?"

"Oh ay, sir," said Hamish, with a demure twinkle in his eye. "I mind fine the time you will fahl into the water off the rock in Loch na Keal."

"Yes, indeed," remarked Mr. Ogilvie, "that is

precisely what I don't see the fun of doing, now that I have got to man's estate, and have a wholesome fear of killing myself. Do you think I would lie down now on wet seaweed, and get slowly soaked through with the rain for a whole hour, on the chance of a seal coming on the other side of the rock? When I tried to get up I was as stiff as a stone. I could not have lifted the rifle if a hundred seals had been there. And it was no wonder at all I slipped down into the water."

"But the sea-water," said Hamish, gravely, "there will be no harm come to you of the sea-water."

"I want to have as little as possible of either sea-water or rain-water," said Mr. Ogilvie, with decision. "I believe Macleod is half an otter himself."

Hamish did not like this, but he only said respectfully—

"I do not think Sir Keith is afraid of a shower of rain whatever."

These gloomy anticipations were surely uncalled for; for during the whole of the past

week the Western Isles had basked in uninterrupted sunlight, with blue skies over the fair blue seas, and a resinous warmth exhaling from the lonely moors. But all the same, next morning broke as if Mr. Ogilvie's forebodings were only too likely to be realised. The sea was leaden-hued, and apparently still, though the booming of the Atlantic swell into the great caverns could be heard; Staffa, and Lunga, and the Dutchman were of a dismal black; the brighter colours of Ulva and Colonsay seemed coldly grey and green; and heavy banks of cloud lay along the land, running out to Ru-Treshanish. The noise of the stream rushing down through the fir-wood close to the castle seemed louder than usual, as if rain had fallen during the night. It was rather cold, too; all that Lady Macleod and Janet could say failed to raise the spirits of their guest.

But when Macleod—dressed in his home-spun tartan—came round from the kennels with the dogs, and Hamish, and the tall red-headed lad, Sandy, it appeared that they

considered this to be rather a fine day than otherwise, and were eager to be off.

"Come along, Ogilvie," Macleod cried, as he gave his friend's gun to Sandy, but shouldered his own. "Sorry we haven't a dog-cart to drive you to the moor, but it is not far off."

"I think a cigar in the library would be the best thing for a morning like this," said Ogilvie, rather gloomily, as he put up the collar of his shooting-jacket, for a drop or two of rain had fallen.

"Nonsense, man; the first bird you kill will cheer you up."

Macleod was right; they had just passed through the wood of young larches close to Castle Dare, and were ascending a rough stone road that led by the side of a deep glen, when a sudden whirr, close by them, startled the silence of this gloomy morning. In an instant Macleod had whipped his gun from his shoulder and thrust it into Ogilvie's hands. By the time the young man had full cocked the right barrel and taken a quick aim, the bird was half-way across the valley; but all the same

he fired. For another second the bird continued its flight, but in a slightly irregular fashion; then down it went like a stone into the heather, on the opposite side of the chasm.

"Well done, sir!" cried old Hamish.

"Bravo!" called out Macleod.

"It was a grand long shot!" said Sandy, as he unslipped the sagacious old retriever, and sent her down into the glen.

They had scarcely spoken when another dark object, looking to the startled eye as if it were the size of a house, sprang from the heather close by and went off like an arrow, uttering a succession of sharp crowings. Why did not he fire? Then they saw him in wild despair whip down the gun, full-cock the left barrel, and put it up again. The bird was just disappearing over a crest of rising ground, and as Ogilvie fired he disappeared altogether.

"He's down, sir!" cried Hamish, in great excitement.

"I don't think so," Ogilvie answered, with a doubtful air on his face, but with a bright gladness in his eyes all the same.

"He's down, sir!" Hamish re-asserted. "Come away, Sandy, with the dog!" he shouted to the red-headed lad, who had gone down into the glen to help Nell in her researches. By this time they saw that Sandy was re-crossing the burn with the grouse in his hand, Nell following him eagerly. The tall lad sprang up the side of the glen in a miraculous fashion, catching here and there by a bunch of heather or the stump of a young larch, and presently he had rejoined the party.

"Tek time, sir," said he; "tek time. Maybe there is more of them about here. And the other one, I marked him down from the other side. We will get him ferry well."

They found nothing, however, until they had got to the other side of the hill, where Nell speedily made herself mistress of the other bird—a fine young cock grouse, plump, and in splendid plumage.

"And what do you think of the morning now, Ogilvie?" Macleod asked.

"Oh, I dare say it will clear," said he,

shyly; and he endeavoured to make light of Hamish's assertions that they were "ferry pretty shots—ferry good shots; and it was always a right thing to put cartridges in the barrels at the door of a house, for no one could tell what might be close to the house; and he was sure that Mr. Ogilvie had not forgotten the use of a gun since he went away from the hills to live in England."

"But look here, Macleod," Mr. Ogilvie said: "why did not you fire yourself?"—and he was very properly surprised; for the most generous and self-denying of men are apt to claim their rights when a grouse gets up to their side.

"Oh," said Macleod simply, "I wanted you to have a shot."

And indeed all through the day he was obviously far more concerned about Ogilvie's shooting than his own. He took all the hardest work on himself—taking the outside beat, for example, if there was a bit of unpromising ground to be got over. When one or other of the dogs suddenly showed by its uplifted fore-paw, its rigid tail, and its slow,

cautious, timid look round for help and encouragement, that there was something ahead of more importance than a lark, Macleod would run all the risks of waiting to give Ogilvie time to come up. If a hare ran across with any chance of coming within shot of Ogilvie, Macleod let her go by unscathed. And the young gentleman from the south knew enough about shooting to understand how he was being favoured both by his host and—what was a more unlikely thing—by Hamish.

He was shooting very well, too; and his spirits rose and rose until the lowering day was forgotten altogether.

"We are in for a soaker this time," he cried quite cheerfully, looking around at one moment.

All this lonely world of olive greens and browns had grown strangely dark. Even the hum of the flies—the only sound audible in these high solitudes away from the sea—seemed stilled; and a cold wind began to blow over from Ben-an-Sloich. The plain of the valley in front of them began to fade from

view; then they found themselves enveloped in a clammy fog that settled on their clothes and hung about their eyelids and beard; while water began to run down the barrels of their guns. The wind blew harder and harder; presently they seemed to spring out of the darkness; and, turning, they found that the cloud had swept onward towards the sea, leaving the rocks on the nearest hill-side all glittering wet in the brief burst of sunlight. It was but a glimmer. Heavier clouds came sweeping over; downright rain began to pour. But Ogilvie kept manfully to his work. He climbed over the stone walls, gripping on with his wet hands. He splashed through the boggy land, paying no attention to his footsteps. And at last he got to following Macleod's plan of crossing a burn, which was merely to wade through the foaming brown water instead of looking out for big stones. By this time the letters in his breast-pocket were a mass of pulp.

"Look here, Macleod," said he, with the rain running down his face, "I can't tell the

difference between one bird and another. If I shoot a partridge it isn't my fault."

"All right," said Macleod. "If a partridge is fool enough to be up here, it deserves it."

Just at this moment Mr. Ogilvie suddenly threw up his hands and his gun, as if to protect his face. An extraordinary object,—a winged object, apparently without a tail—a whirring bunch of loose grey feathers—a creature resembling no known fowl—had been put up by one of the dogs, and it had flown direct at Ogilvie's head. It passed him at about half-a-yard's distance.

"What in all the world is that?" he cried, jumping round to have a look at it.

"Why," said Macleod, who was roaring with laughter, "it is a baby black-cock, just out of the shell, I should think!"

A sudden noise behind him caused him to wheel round, and instinctively he put up his gun. He took it down again.

"That is the old hen," said he; "we'll leave her to look after her chicks. Hamish, get in the dogs, or they'll be for eating some of those

young ones. And you, Sandy, where was it you left the basket? We will go for our splendid banquet now, Ogilvie."

That was an odd-looking party that by and by might have been seen crouching under the lee of a stone wall, with a small brook running by their feet. They had taken down wet stones for seats; and these were somewhat insecurely fixed on the steep bank. But neither the rain, nor the gloom, nor the loneliness of the silent moors, seemed to have damped their spirits much.

"It really is awfully kind of you, Ogilvie," Macleod said, as he threw half a sandwich to the old black retriever, "to take pity on a solitary fellow like myself. You can't tell how glad I was to see you on the bridge of the steamer. And now that you have taken all the trouble to come to this place—and have taken your chance of our poor shooting—this is the sort of day you get!"

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Ogilvie, who did not refuse to have his tumbler replenished by the attentive Hamish, "it is quite the other way.

I consider myself precious lucky. I consider the shooting first-rate; and it isn't every fellow would deliberately hand the whole thing over to his friend—as you have been doing all day. And I suppose bad weather is as bad elsewhere as it is here?"

Macleod was carelessly filling his pipe—and obviously thinking of something very different.

"Man, Ogilvie," he said, in a burst of confidence, "I never knew before how fearfully lonely a life we lead here. If we were out on one of the Treshnish Islands, with nothing round us but skarts and gulls, we could scarcely be lonelier. And I have been thinking all the morning what this must look like to you."

He glanced round—at the sombre browns and greens of the solitary moorland—at the black rocks jutting out here and there from the scant grass—at the silent and gloomy hills, and the overhanging clouds.

"I have been thinking of the beautiful places we saw in London—and the crowds of people—the constant change, and amusement,

and life. And I shouldn't wonder if you packed up your traps to-morrow morning, and fled."

"My dear boy," observed Mr. Ogilvie, confidentially, "you are giving me credit for a vast amount of sentiment. I haven't got it. I don't know what it is. But I know when I'm jolly well off. I know when I am in good quarters, with good shooting, and with a good sort of chap to go about with. As for London—bah! I rather think you got your eyes dazzled for a minute, Macleod. You weren't long enough there to find it out. And wouldn't you get precious tired of big dinners, and garden parties, and all that stuff, after a time? Macleod, do you mean to tell me you ever saw anything at Lady Beauregard's as fine as *that?*"

And he pointed to a goodly show of birds, with a hare or two, that Sandy had taken out of the bag, so as to count them.

"Of course," said this wise young man, "there is one case in which that London life is all very well. If a man is awful spoons on a girl, then of course he can trot after her from house to house,

and walk his feet off in the Park. I remember a fellow saying a very clever thing about the reasons that took a man into society. What was it now? Let me see—it was either to look out for a wife—or—or——"

Mr. Ogilvie was trying to recollect the epigram and to light a wax match at the same time; and he failed in both.

"Well," said he, "I won't spoil it; but don't you believe that any one you met in London wouldn't be precious glad to change places with us at this moment?"

Any one? What was the situation? Pouring rain, leaden skies, the gloomy solitude of the high moors, the sound of roaring waters. And here they were crouching under a stone wall, with their dripping fingers lighting match after match for their damp pipes, with not a few midges in the moist and clammy air, and with a faint halo of steam plainly arising from the leather of their boots. When Fionaghal the Fair Stranger came from over the blue seas to her new home, was this the picture of Highland life that was presented to her?

"Lady Beauregard, for example?" said Macleod.

"Oh, I am not talking about women," observed the sagacious boy; "I never could make out a woman's notions about anything. I dare say they like London life well enough; for there they can show off their shoulders and their diamonds."

"Ogilvie," Macleod said, with a sudden earnestness, "I am fretting my heart out here—that is the fact. If it were not for the poor old mother—and Janet—but I will tell you another time."

He got up on his feet, and took his gun from Sandy. His companion—wondering not a little, but saying nothing—did likewise. Was this the man who had always seemed rather proud of his hard life on the hills? who had regarded the idleness and effeminacy of town-life with something of an unexpressed scorn? A young fellow in robust health and splendid spirits—an eager sportsman and an accurate shot—out for his first shooting-day of the year: was it intelligible that he should be visited by senti-

mental regrets for London drawing-rooms and vapid talk? The getting up of a snipe interrupted these speculations; Ogilvie blazed away, missing with both barrels; Macleod, who had been waiting to see the effect of the shots, then put up his gun, and presently the bird tumbled down some fifty yards off.

"You haven't warmed to it yet," Macleod said, charitably. "The first half hour after luncheon a man always shoots badly."

"Especially when his clothes are glued to his skin from head to foot," said Ogilvie.

"You will soon walk some heat into yourself."

And again they went on, Macleod pursuing the same tactics, so that his companion had the cream of the shooting. Despite the continual soaking rain, Ogilvie's spirits seemed to become more and more buoyant. He was shooting capitally; one very long shot he made, bringing down an old black-cock with a thump on the heather, causing Hamish to exclaim—

"Well done, sir! It is a glass of whisky you will deserve for that shot."

Whereupon Mr. Ogilvie stopped and modestly hinted that he would accept of at least a moiety of the proffered reward.

"Do you know, Hamish," said he, "that it is the greatest comfort in the world to get wet right through, for you know you can't be worse, and it gives you no trouble?"

"And a whole glass will do you no harm, sir," shrewdly observed Hamish.

"Not in the clouds."

"The what, sir?"

"The clouds. Don't you consider we are going shooting through clouds?"

"There will be a snipe or two down here, sir," said Hamish, moving on; for he could not understand conundrums—especially conundrums in English.

The day remained of this moist character to the end; but they had plenty of sport; and they had a heavy bag on their return to Castle Dare. Macleod was rather silent on the way home. Ogilvie was still at a loss to know why his friend should have taken this sudden dislike to living in a place he had

lived in all his life. Nor could he understand why Macleod should have deliberately surrendered to him the chance of bagging the brace of grouse that got up by the side of the road. It was scarcely, he considered, within the possibilities of human nature.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONFESSION.

And once again the big dining-hall of Castle Dare was ablaze with candles; and Janet was there, gravely listening to the garrulous talk of the boy-officer; and Keith Macleod, in his dress tartan; and the noble-looking old lady at the head of the table, who more than once expressed to her guest, in that sweetly-modulated and gracious voice of hers, how sorry she was he had had so bad a day for the first day of his visit.

"It is different with Keith," said she, "for he is used to be out in all weathers. He has been brought up to live out of doors."

"But you know, auntie," said Janet Macleod, "a soldier is much of the same thing. Did you ever hear of a soldier with an umbrella?"

"All I know is," remarked Mr. Ogilvie—who, in his smart evening dress, and with his face flushed into a rosy warmth after the cold and the wet, did not look particularly miserable — "that I don't remember ever enjoying myself so much in one day. But the fact is, Lady Macleod, your son gave me all the shooting; and Hamish was sounding my praises all day long, so that I almost got to think I could shoot the birds without putting up the gun at all; and when I made a frightful bad miss, everybody declared the bird was dead round the other side of the hill."

"And indeed you were not making many misses," Macleod said. "But we will try your nerve, Ogilvie, with a stag or two, I hope."

"I am on for anything. What with Hamish's flattery and the luck I had to-day, I begin to believe I could bag a brace of tigers if they were coming at me fifty miles an hour."

Dinner over, and Donald having played his best (no doubt he had learned that the stranger was an officer in the 93rd), the ladies left the dining-hall, and presently Macleod proposed to his friend that they should go into the library and have a smoke. Ogilvie was nothing loth. They went into the odd little room, with its guns and rods, and stuffed birds, and, lying prominently on the writing-table, a valuable little heap of dressed otter-skins. Although the night was scarcely cold enough to demand it, there was a log of wood burning in the fireplace; there were two easy-chairs, low and roomy; and on the mantelpiece were some glasses and a big, black, broad-bottomed bottle, such as used to carry the still vintages of Champagne even into the remote wilds of the Highlands, before the art of making sparkling wines had been discovered. Mr. Ogilvie lit a cigar; stretched out his feet towards the blazing log; and rubbed his hands—which were not as white as usual.

"You are a lucky fellow, Macleod," said he, "and you don't know it. You have everything about you here to make life enjoyable."

"And I feel like a slave tied to a galley-oar," said he quickly. "I try to hide it from the mother—for it would break her heart—and from Janet too; but every morning I rise, the dismalness of being alone here—of being caged up alone—eats more and more into my heart. When I look at you, Ogilvie — to-morrow morning you could go spinning off to any quarter you liked—to see any one you wanted to see——"

"Macleod," said his companion, looking up, and yet speaking rather slowly and timidly, "if I were to say what would naturally occur to any one—you won't be offended? What you have been telling me is absurd, unnatural, impossible, unless there is a woman in the case."

"And what then?" Macleod said quickly, as he regarded his friend with a watchful look. "You have guessed?"

"Yes," said the other—"Gertrude White."

Macleod was silent for a second or two. Then he sate down.

"I scarcely care who knows it now," said he absently, "so long as I can't fight it out of my own mind. I tried not to know it. I tried not to believe it. I argued with myself—laughed at myself—invented a hundred explanations of this cruel thing that was gnawing away at my heart and giving me no peace night or day. Why, man, Ogilvie, I have read 'Pendennis'! Would you think it possible that any one who has read 'Pendennis' could ever fall in love with an actress?"

He jumped to his feet again—walked up and down for a second or two—twisting the while a bit of a casting-line round his finger so that it threatened to cut into the flesh.

"But I will tell you now, Ogilvie—now that I am speaking to any one about it," said he—and he spoke in a rapid, deep, earnest voice, obviously not caring much what his companion might think, so that he could relieve his overburdened

mind—"that it was not any actress I fell in love with. I never saw her in a theatre but that once. I hated the theatre whenever I thought of her in it. I dared scarcely open a newspaper, lest I should see her name. I turned away from the posters in the streets: when I happened by some accident to see her publicly paraded that way, I shuddered all through—with shame, I think; and I got to look on her father as a sort of devil, that had been allowed to drive about that beautiful creature in vile chains. Oh! I cannot tell you. When I have heard him talking away in that infernal, cold, precise way, about her duties to her art—and insisting that she should have no sentiments or feelings of her own, and that she should simply use every emotion as a bit of something to impose on the public—a bit of her trade—an exposure of her own feelings to make people clap their hands—I have sat still and wondered at myself that I did not jump up and catch him by the throat and shake the life out of his miserable body."

"You have cut your hand, Macleod."

He shook a drop or two of blood off.

"Why, Ogilvie, when I saw you on the bridge of the steamer, I nearly went mad with delight. I said to myself, 'Here is some one who has seen her, and spoken to her; who will know when I tell him.' And now that I am telling you of it, Ogilvie, you will see—you will understand—that it is not any actress I have fallen in love with—it was not the fascination of an actress at all—but the fascination of the woman herself; the fascination of her voice, and her sweet ways, and the very way she walked too, and the tenderness of her heart. There was a sort of wonder about her; whatever she did, or said, was so beautiful, and simple, and sweet! And day after day I said to myself that my interest in this beautiful woman was nothing. Some one told me there had been rumours: I laughed. Could any one suppose I was going to play 'Pendennis' over again? And then as the time came for me to leave, I was glad and I was miserable at the same time. I despised myself for being miserable. And then I said to myself,

'This stupid misery is only the fancy of a boy. Wait till you get back to Castle Dare, and the rough seas, and the hard work of the stalking. There is no sickness and sentiment on the side of Ben-an-Sloich.' And so I was glad to come to Castle Dare; and to see the old mother, and Janet, and Hamish; and the sound of the pipes, Ogilvie, when I heard them away in the steamer, that brought tears to my eyes; and I said to myself, 'Now you are at home again, and there will be no more nonsense of idle thinking.' And what has it come to? I would give everything I possess in the world to see her face once more—ay, to be in the same town where she is. I read the papers, trying to find out where she is. Morning and night it is the same—a fire, burning and burning—of impatience, and misery, and a craving just to see her face and hear her speak."

Ogilvie did not know what to say. There was something in this passionate confession—in the cry wrung from a strong man—and in the rude eloquence that here and there burst from him—

that altogether drove ordinary words of counsel or consolation out of the young man's mind.

"You have been hard hit, Macleod," he said, with some earnestness.

"That is just it," Macleod said almost bitterly. "You fire at a bird. You think you have missed him. He sails away as if there was nothing the matter, and the rest of the covey no doubt think he is as well as any one of them. But suddenly you see there is something wrong. He gets apart from the others; he towers; then down he comes, as dead as a stone. You did not guess anything of this in London?"

"Well," said Ogilvie, rather inclined to beat about the bush, "I thought you were paying her a good deal of attention. But then—she is very popular, you know—and receives a good deal of attention—and, and, the fact is, she is an uncommonly pretty girl, and I thought you were flirting a bit with her, but nothing more than that. I had no idea it was something more serious than that."

"Ay," Macleod said, "if I myself had only

known! If it was a plunge—as people talk about falling in love with a woman—why the next morning I would have shaken myself free of it, as a Newfoundland dog shakes himself free of the water. But a fever—a madness—that slowly gains on you—and you look around and say it is nothing—but day after day it burns more and more. And it is no longer something that you can look at apart from yourself—it is your very self; and sometimes, Ogilvie, I wonder whether it is all true, or whether it is mad I am altogether. Newcastle—do you know Newcastle?"

"I have passed through it, of course," his companion said, more and more amazed at the vehemence of his speech.

"It is there she is now—I have seen it in the papers; and it is Newcastle—Newcastle—Newcastle—I am thinking of from morning till night; and if I could only see one of the streets of it I should be glad. They say it is smoky and grimy; I should be breathing sunlight if I lived in the most squalid of all its houses! And they say she is going to

Liverpool, and to Manchester, and to Leeds; and it is as if my very life were being drawn away from me. I try to think what people may be around her; I try to imagine what she is doing at a particular hour of the day; and I feel as if I were shut away in an island in the middle of the Atlantic, with nothing but the sound of the waves around my ears. Ogilvie, it is enough to drive a man out of his senses."

"But look here, Macleod," said Ogilvie, pulling himself together; for it was hard to resist the influence of this vehement and uncontrollable passion—"look here, man: why don't you think of it in cold blood? Do you expect me to sympathise with you, as a friend? Or would you like to know what any ordinary man of the world would think of the whole case?"

"Don't give me your advice, Ogilvie," said he, untwining and throwing away the bit of casting-line that had cut into his finger. "It is far beyond that. Let me talk to you—that is all. I should have gone mad in another week,

if I had had no one to speak to; and as it is, what better am I than mad? It is not anything to be analysed and cured: it is my very self; and what have I become?"

"But look here, Macleod—I want to ask you a question: would you marry her?"

The common-sense of the younger man was re-asserting itself. This was what any one—looking at the whole situation from the Aldershot point of view—would at the outset demand? But if Macleod had known all that was implied in the question, it is probable that a friendship that had existed from boyhood would then and there have been severed. He took it that Ogilvie was merely referring to the thousand and one obstacles that lay between him and that obvious and natural goal.

"Marry her!" he exclaimed. "Yes—you are right to look at it in that way—to think of what it will all lead to. When I look forward, I see nothing but a maze of impossibilities and trouble. One might as well have fallen in love with one of the Roman maidens in the temple of Vesta.

She is a white slave. She is a sacrifice to the monstrous theories of that bloodless old Pagan, her father. And then she is courted and flattered on all sides; she lives in a smoke of incense: do you think, even supposing that all other difficulties were removed—that she cared for no one else, that she were to care for me, that the influence of her father was gone—do you think she would surrender all the admiration she provokes and the excitement of the life she leads, to come and live in a dungeon in the Highlands? A single day like to-day would kill her—she is so fine, and delicate—like a rose-leaf, I have often thought. No, no, Ogilvie, I have thought of it every way. It is like a riddle that you twist and twist about, to try and get the answer; and I can get no answer at all, unless wishing that I had never been born. And, perhaps that would have been better."

"You take too gloomy a view of it, Macleod," said Ogilvie. "For one thing, look at the common-sense of the matter. Suppose that she is very ambitious to succeed in her profession,

that is all very well; but mind you, it is a very hard life. And if you put before her the chance of being styled Lady Macleod — well, I may be wrong, but I should say that would count for something. I haven't known many actresses myself——"

"That is idle talk," Macleod said; and then he added proudly, "You do not know this woman as I know her."

He put aside his pipe; but in truth he had never lit it.

"Come," said he, with a tired look, "I have bored you enough. You won't mind, Ogilvie? The whole of the day I was saying to myself that I would keep all this thing to myself, if my heart burst over it; but you see I could not do it; and I have made you the victim after all. And we will go into the drawing-room now; and we will have a song. And that was a very good song you sang one night in London, Ogilvie—it was about 'Death's black wine'—and do you think you could sing us that song to-night?"

Ogilvie looked at him.

"I don't know what you mean by the way you are talking, Macleod," said he.

"Oh," said he, with a laugh that did not sound quite natural, "have you forgotten it? Well, then, Janet will sing us another song—that is, 'Farewell, Manchester.' And we will go to bed soon to-night; for I have not been having much sleep lately. But it is a good song—it is a song you do not easily forget—that about 'Death's black wine.'"

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